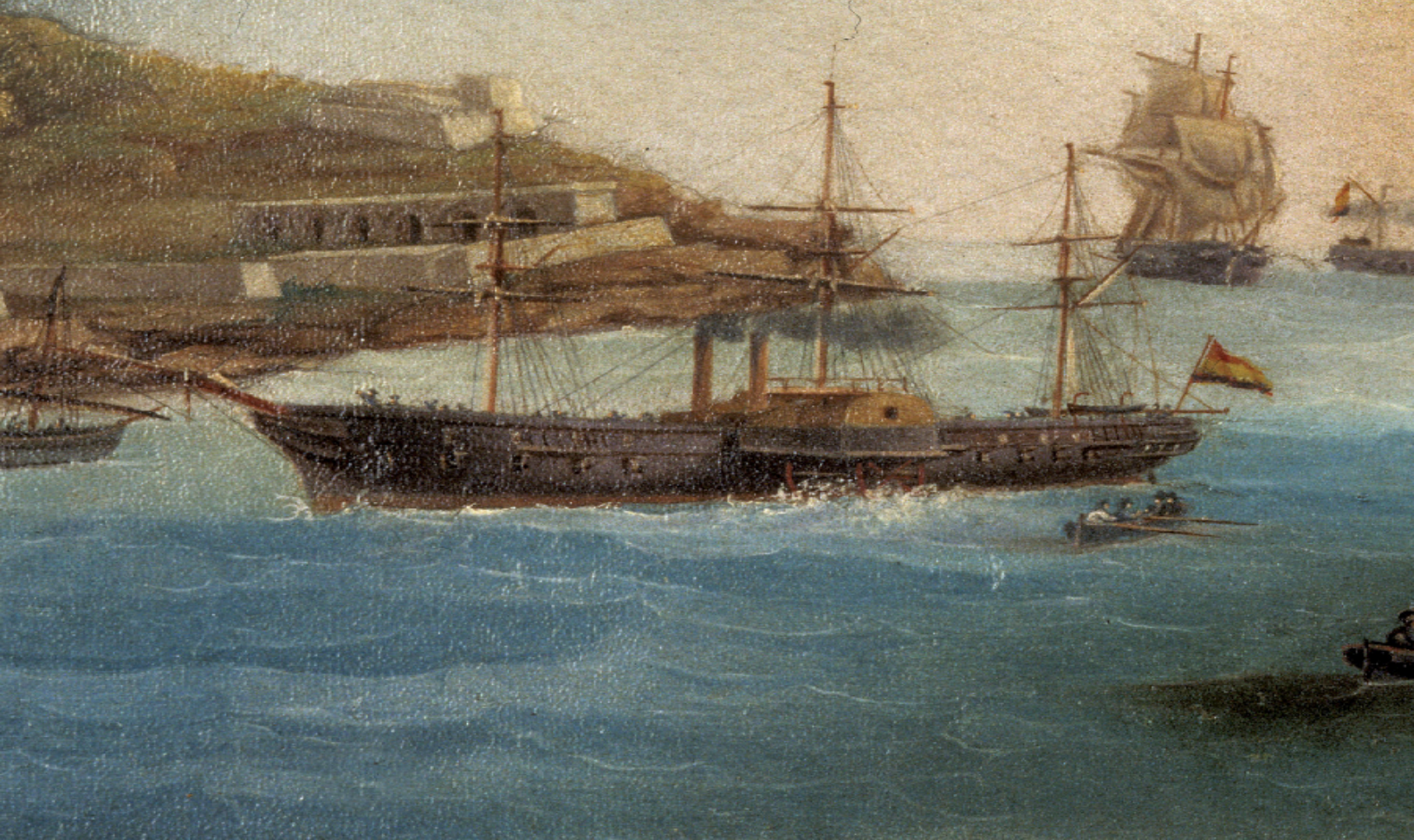


Benito Pérez Galdós

TRAFALGAR & SARAGOSSA



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Trafalgar & Saragossa

Spanish Historical Novels

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CHAPTER I.

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I trust that, before relating the important events of which I have been an eye-witness, I may be allowed to say a few words about my early life and to explain the singular accidents and circumstances which resulted in my being present at our great naval catastrophe.

In speaking of my birth I cannot follow the example of most writers who narrate the facts of their own lives, and who begin by naming their ancestry—usually of noble rank, *hidalgos* at the very least, if not actually descended from some royal or imperial progenitor. I cannot grace my opening page with high-sounding names, for, excepting my mother whom I remember for some few years, I know nothing of any of my forefathers, unless it be Adam from whom my descent would seem to be indisputable. In short, my history began in much the same way as that of Pablos, the brigand of Segovia; happily it pleased God that it should resemble it in no other particular.

I was born at Cadiz in the notorious quarter “de la Viña,” which was not then, any more than at the present day, a good school of either morals or manners. My memory does not throw any light on the events of my infancy till I was six years old, and I remember that, only because I associate the idea of being six with an event I heard much talked about, the battle of Cape St. Vincent, which took place in 1797.

Endeavoring to see myself as I was at that time, with the curiosity and interest which must attach to self-contemplation, I am aware of a dim and hazy little figure in the picture of past events, playing in the creek with other small boys of the same age, more or less. This was to me the whole of life—as it was, at any rate, to our privileged class; those who did not live as I did appeared to me

exceptional beings. In my childish ignorance of the world I firmly believed that man was made for the sea, Providence having created him to swim as being the noblest exercise of his limbs and body, and to dive for crabs as the highest use of his intelligence—and especially to fish up and sell the highly-esteemed crustacean known as *Bocas de la Isla*—as well as for his personal delectation and enjoyment, thus combining pleasure with profit.

The society into which I was born was indeed of the roughest, as ignorant and squalid as can well be imagined; so much so that the boys of our quarter of the town were regarded as even lower than those of the adjoining suburb of Puntales, whose occupations were the same and who defied the elements with equal devilry; the result of this invidious distinction was that each party looked upon the other as rivals, and the opposing forces would meet from time to time for a pitched battle with stones, when the earth was stained with heroic blood.

When I was old enough to begin to think that I might go into business on my own account, with a view to turning an honest penny, I remember that my sharpness stood me in good stead on the quay where I acted as *valet de place* to the numerous English who then, as now, disembarked there. The quay was a free academy peculiarly fitted to sharpen the wits and make the learner wide-awake, and I was not one of the least apt of its disciples in that wide branch of human experience; nor did I fail to distinguish myself in petty thefts, especially of fruit, an art for which the Plaza de San Juan offered an ample field, both for the experiments of the beginner and the exploits of the adept. But I have no wish to enlarge on this part of my history, for I blush with shame now, as I remember the depth to which I had sunk, and I thank God for having released me from it at an early period, and directed me into a better path.

Among the impressions which remain most vivid in my memory is the enthusiastic delight I felt at the sight of

vessels of war, when they anchored outside Cadiz or in the cove of San Fernando. As I had no means of satisfying my curiosity, when I saw these enormous structures I conceived the most absurd and fanciful ideas about them, imagining them as full of mysteries.

Always eager to mimic the greater world around us, we boys too had our squadrons of little ships, roughly hewn in wood, with sails of paper or of rag, which we navigated with the greatest deliberation and gravity in the pools of Puntales or La Caleta. To make all complete, whenever a few coppers came into our hands, earned by one or another of our small industries, we bought powder of old "Aunt Coscoja" in the street "del Torno de Santa María," and with this we could have a grand naval display. Our fleets sailed before the wind in an ocean three yards across, fired off their cannon, came alongside of each other to mimic a hand-to-hand fight—in which the imaginary crews valiantly held their own, and swarmed into the tops unfurling the flag, made of any scrap of colored rag we could pick up in a dust-heap—while we danced with ecstasy on the shore at the popping of the artillery, imagining ourselves to be the nationalities represented by our respective standards, and almost believing that in the world of grown-up men and great events the nations too would leap for joy, looking on at the victories of their splendid fleets. Boys see things through strange windows.

Those were times of great sea-fights, for there was one at least every year and a skirmish every month. I thought that fleets met in battle simply and solely because they enjoyed it, or to prove their strength and valor, like two bullies who meet outside the walls to stick knives into each other. I laugh when I recollect the wild ideas I had about the persons and events of the time. I heard a great deal about Napoleon and how do you think I had pictured him to myself! In every respect exactly like the smugglers whom we not unfrequently saw in our low quarter of the town:

Contrabandistas from the lines at Gibraltar. I fancied him a man on horseback, on a Xerez nag, with a cloak, high boots, a broad felt-hat, and a blunderbuss of course. With these accoutrements, and followed by other adventurers on the same pattern, I supposed this man, whom all agreed in describing as most extraordinary, to have conquered Europe, which I fancied was a large island within which were other islands which were the different nations: England, Genoa, London, France, Malta, the land where the Moors lived, America, Gibraltar, Port Mahon, Russia, Toulon and so forth. This scheme of geography I had constructed on the basis of the names of the places from which the ships came whose passengers I had to deal with; and I need not say that of all these nations or islands Spain was the very best, for which reason the English—men after the likeness of highwaymen—wanted to get it for their own. Talking of these and similar matters I and my amphibious companions would give vent to sentiments and opinions inspired by the most ardent patriotism.

However, I need not weary the reader with trifles which relate only to my personal fancies, so I will say no more about myself. The one living soul that made up to me for the wretchedness of life by a wholly disinterested love for me, was my mother. All I can remember of her is that she was extremely pretty, or at any rate she seemed so to me. From the time when she was left a widow she maintained herself and me by doing washing, and mending sailors' clothes. She must have loved me dearly. I fell ill of yellow fever which was raging in Andalusia and when I got well she took me solemnly to mass at the old cathedral and made me kneel on the pavement for more than an hour, and then, as an *ex-voto* offering, she placed an image in wax of a child, which I believed to be an exact likeness of myself, at the foot of the altar where the service had been performed.

My mother had a brother, and if she was pretty, he was ugly and a cruel wretch into the bargain. I cannot think of

my uncle without horror, and from one or two occurrences which I remember vividly I infer that this man must have committed some crime at the time I refer to. He was a sailor; when he was on shore and at Cadiz he would come home furiously drunk, and treat us brutally—his sister with words, calling her every abusive name, and me with deeds, beating me without any reason whatever.

My mother must have suffered greatly from her brother's atrocities, and these, added to severe labor for miserable pay, hastened her death which left an indelible impression on my feelings, though the details dwell but vaguely in my memory. During this period of misery and vagabondage my only occupations were playing by the sea-shore or running about the streets. My only troubles were a beating from my uncle, a frown from my mother, or some mishap in the conduct of my squadrons. I had never felt any really strong or deep emotion till the loss of my mother showed me life under a harder and clearer aspect than it had ever before presented to me. The shock it gave me has never faded from my mind. After all these years I still remember, as we remember the horrible pictures of a bad dream, that my mother lay prostrate from some sickness, I know not what; I remember women coming and going, whose names and purpose I cannot recall; I remember hearing cries of lamentation, and being placed in my mother's arms, and then I remember the shudder that ran through my whole body at the touch of a cold, cold hand. I think I was then taken away; but mixed up with these dim memories I can see the yellow tapers which gave a ghastly light at mid-day, I can hear the muttering of prayers, the hoarse whispers of the old gossips, the laughter of drunken sailors—and then came the lonely sense of orphanhood, the certainty that I was alone and abandoned in the world, which for a time absorbed me entirely.

I have no recollection of what my uncle was doing at that time; I only know that his brutality to me increased to such

a point that, weary of his cruelty, I ran away, determined to seek my fortune. I fled to San Fernando and from thence to Puerto Real. I hung on to the lowest class that haunt the shore, which has always been a famous nest for gaol-birds. Why or wherefore I quite forget, but I found myself with a gang of these choice spirits at Medinasidonia when, one day, a tavern where we were sitting was entered by a press-gang and we promptly separated, each hiding himself as best he might. My good star led me to a house where the owners had pity on me, taking the greatest interest in me, no doubt by reason of the story I told, on my knees and drowned in tears, of my miserable plight, my past life and all my misfortunes.

These good people took me under their protection and saved me from the press-gang, and from that time I remained in their service. With them I went to Vejer de la Frontera where they lived; they had only been passing through Medinasidonia.

My guardian angels were Don Alonso Gutierrez de Cisniega, a ship's captain, and his wife, both advanced in years. They taught me much that I did not know, and as they took a great fancy to me before long I was promoted to be Don Alonso's page, accompanying him in his daily walks, for the worthy veteran could not use his right arm, and it was with difficulty that he moved his right leg. What they saw in me to arouse their interest I do not know; my tender years, my desolate circumstances and no doubt too my ready obedience may have contributed to win their benevolence, for which I have always been deeply grateful. I may also add—though I say it that should not—as explaining their kind feeling towards me, that although I had always lived among the lowest and most destitute class, I had a certain natural refinement of mind which enabled me very soon to improve in manners, and in a few years, notwithstanding I had no opportunities for learning, I could pass for a lad of respectable birth and training.

I had spent four years in this home when the events happened which I must now relate. The reader must not expect an accuracy of detail which is out of my power when speaking of events which happened in my tender youth, to be recalled in the evening of my existence when I am near the end of a long and busy life and already feel the slow poison of old age numbing the fingers that use the pen; while the torpid brain strives to cheat itself into transient return of youth, by conjuring up the sweet or ardent memories of the past. As some old men strive to revive the warm delights of the past by gazing at pictures of the beauties they have known, I will try to give some interest and vigor to the faded reminiscences of my long past days, and to warm them with the glow of a counterfeit presentment of departed glories.

The effect is magical! How marvellous are the illusions of fancy! I look back with curiosity and astonishment at the bygone years, as we look through the pages of a book we were reading, and left with a leaf turned down to mark the place; and so long as the charm works I feel as if some beneficent genius had suddenly relieved me of the weight of old age, mitigating the burden of years which crushes body and spirit alike. This blood—this tepid and languid ichor, which now scarcely lends warmth and life to my failing limbs, grows hot again, flows, boils, and fires my veins with a swifter course. A sudden light breaks in upon my brain, giving color and relief to numberless strange figures—just as the traveller's torch, blazing in some dark cavern, reveals the marvels of geology so unexpectedly that it seems as though they were then and there created. And my heart rises from the grave of past emotions—a Lazarus called by the voice of its Lord—and leaps in my breast with joy and pain at once.

I am young again; time has turned backwards, I stand in the presence of the events of my boyhood; I clasp the hands of old friends, the joys and griefs of my youth stir my soul

once more—the fever of triumph, the anguish of defeat, intense delights, acute sorrows—all crowded and mixed in my memory as they were in life. But stronger than any other feeling one reigns supreme, one which guided all my actions during the fateful period between 1805 and 1834. As I approach the grave and reflect how useless I am among men—even now tears start to my eyes with the sacred love of country. I can only serve it with words—cursing the base scepticism which can deny it, and the corrupt philosophy which can treat it as a mere fashion of a day.

This was the passion to which I consecrated the vigor of my manhood, and to this I will devote the labors of my last years, enthroning it as the tutelary genius, the guiding spirit of my story as it has been of my existence. I have much to tell. Trafalgar, Bailén, Madrid, Zaragoza, Gerona, Arapiles!—I can tell you something of all these, if your patience does not fail. My story may not be as elegantly told as it should be but I will do my best to insure its being true.

CHAPTER II.

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It was on one of the early days of October in that fatal year, 1805, that my worthy master called me into his room and looked at me with the severity that was habitual to him—a severity that was only on the surface for his nature was gentleness itself—he said:

“Gabriel, are you a brave man?”

I did not know what to answer, for, to tell the truth, in my fourteen years of life no opportunity had ever presented itself for me to astonish the world with any deed of valor; still, it filled me with pride to hear myself called a man, and thinking it ill-judged to deny myself the credit of courage before any one who held it in such high estimation, I answered, with boyish boldness:

“Yes, sir, I am a brave man.”

At this the noble gentleman, who had shed his blood in a hundred glorious fights and who nevertheless did not disdain to treat a faithful servant with frank confidence, smiled at me kindly, signed to me to take a seat, and seemed on the point of informing me of some business of importance, when his wife, my mistress, Doña Francisca entered the study, and, to give further interest to the discussion, began to declaim with vehemence.

“You are not to go,” she said, “I declare you shall not join the fleet. What next will you be wanting to do?—at your age and when you have long retired as superannuated! No, no, Alonso my dear. You are past sixty and your dancing days are over.”

I can see her now, that respectable and indignant dame—with her deep-bordered cap, her muslin dress, her white curls, and a hairy mole on one side of her chin. I describe these miscellaneous details, for they are inseparable from

my recollection of her. She was pretty even in old age, like Murillo's Santa Anna, and her sober beauty would have justified the comparison if only the lady had been as silent as a picture. Don Alonso somewhat cowed, as he always was, by her flow of words, answered quietly:

"I must go, Paquita. From the letter I have just now received from my worthy friend Churruca, I learn that the united squadrons are either to sail from Cadiz and engage the English or to wait for them in the bay in case they are so bold as to enter. In either case it will be no child's play."

"That is well, and I am glad to hear it," replied Doña Francisca. "There are Gravina, Valdés, Cisneros, Churruca, Alcalá Galiano, and Alava; let them pound away at the English dogs. But you are a piece of useless lumber who can do no good if you go. Why you cannot move that left arm which they dislocated for you at Cape St. Vincent."

My master lifted his arm, with a stiff attempt at military precision, to show that he could use it. But his wife, not convinced by so feeble an argument, went on with shrill asseveration.

"No, you shall not go, what can they want of a piece of antiquity like you. If you were still forty as you were when you went to Tierra del Fuego and brought me back those green Indian necklaces.—Then indeed! But now!—I know, that ridiculous fellow Marcial fired your brain this morning with talking to you about battles. It seems to me that Señor Marcial and I will come to quarrelling.—Let him go to the ships if he likes and pay them out for the foot he lost! Oh! Saint Joseph the blessed! If I had known when I was a girl what you seamen were! Endless worry; never a day's peace! A woman marries to live with her husband and one fine day a dispatch comes from Madrid and he is sent off at two minutes notice to the Lord knows where—Patagonia or Japan or the infernal regions. For ten or twelve months she sees nothing of him and at last, if the savages have not eaten him meanwhile, he comes back again the picture of

misery—so ill and yellow that she does not know what to do to restore him to his right color. But old birds are not to be caught in a trap, and then suddenly another dispatch comes from Madrid, with orders to go to Toulon or Brest or Naples—go here and go there—wherever it is necessary to meet the whims of that rascally First Consul...! If you would all do as I say, you would soon payout these gentlemen who keep the world in a turmoil!”

My master sat smiling and gazing at a cheap print, badly colored by some cheap artist, which was nailed against the wall, and which represented the Emperor Napoleon mounted on a green charger, in the celebrated “redingote” which was smeared with vermilion. It was no doubt the sight of this work of art, which I had seen daily for four years, which had modified my ideas with respect to the smuggler’s costume of the great man of the day, and had fixed his image in my mind as dressed something like a cardinal and riding a green horse.

“This is not living!” Doña Francisca went on, throwing up her arms: “God forgive me, but I hate the sea, though they say it is one of His most glorious works. What is the use of the Holy Inquisition, will you tell me, if it is not to burn those diabolical ships of war to ashes? What is the good of this incessant firing of cannon—balls upon balls, all directed against four boards, as you may say, which are soon smashed to leave hundreds of hapless wretches to drown in the sea? Is not that provoking God?—And yet you men are half-wild as soon as you hear a cannon fired! Merciful Heaven! my flesh creeps at the sound, and if every one was of my way of thinking, we should have no more sea-fights, and the cannon would be cast into bells. Look here, Alonso,” she said, standing still in front of her husband, “it seems to me that they have done you damage enough already; what more do you want? You and a parcel of madmen like yourself—had you not enough to satisfy you on the 14th?”¹

Don Alonso clenched his fists at this bitter reminiscence, and it was only out of consideration for his wife, to whom he paid the utmost respect, that he suppressed a good round oath.

"I lay all the blame of your absurd determination to join the fleet to that rascally Marcial," the lady went on, warming with her own eloquence; "that maniac for the sea who ought to have been drowned a hundred times and over, but that he escaped a hundred times to be the torment of my life. If he wants to join, with his wooden leg, his broken arm, his one eye, and his fifty wounds—let him go, by all means, and God grant he may never come back here again—but you shall not go, Alonso, for you are past service and have done enough for the King who has paid you badly enough in all conscience. If I were you, I would throw those captain's epaulettes you have worn these ten years in the face of the Generalissimo of the land and sea forces. My word! they ought have made you admiral, at least; you earned that when you went on that expedition to Africa and brought me back those blue beads which I gave with the Indian necklace to decorate the votive urn to the Virgin 'del Carmen.'"

"Admiral or not, it is my duty to join the fleet, Paquita," said my master. "I cannot be absent from this struggle. I feel that I must pay off some of my arrears to the English."

"Do you talk of paying off arrears!" exclaimed my mistress; "you—old, feeble, and half-crippled...."

"Gabriel will go with me," said Don Alonso, with a look at me which filled me with valor.

I bowed to signify that I agreed to this heroic scheme, but I took care not to be seen by my mistress, who would have let me feel the full weight of her hand if she had suspected my bellicose inclinations. Indeed, seeing that her husband was fully determined, she was more furious than ever, declaring that if she had to live her life again nothing should induce her to marry a sailor. She cursed the Emperor, abused our revered King, the Prince of Peace, and all those

who had signed the Treaty of Subsidies, ending by threatening the brave old man with punishment from Heaven for his insane rashness.

During this dialogue, which I have reported with approximate exactness as I have to depend on my memory, a loud barking cough in the adjoining room revealed the fact that Marcial, the old sailor, could overhear with perfect ease, my mistress's vehement harangue, in which she had so frequently mentioned him in by no means flattering terms. Being now desirous of taking part in the conversation, as his intimacy in the house fully justified his doing, he opened the door and came into Don Alfonso's room. Before going any farther I must give some account of my master's former history, and of his worthy wife, that the reader may have a better understanding of what follows.

CHAPTER III.

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Don Alfonso Gutierrez de Cisniega belonged to an old family of Vejer, where he lived. He had been devoted at an early age to a naval career and, while still quite young, had distinguished himself in defending Havana against the English in 1748. He was afterwards engaged in the expedition which sailed from Cartagena against the Algerines in 1775, and was present at the attack upon Gibraltar under the Duke de Crillon in 1782. He subsequently joined the expedition to the Straits of Magellan in the corvette *Santa María de la Cabeza*, commanded by Don Antonio de Córdoba, and fought in the glorious engagements between the Anglo-Spanish fleet and the French before Toulon in 1793, terminating his career of glory at the disastrous battle of Cape St. Vincent, where he commanded the *Mejicano*, one of the ships which were forced to surrender.

From that time my master, whose promotion had been slower than his laborious and varied career had merited, retired from active service. He suffered much in body from the wounds he had received on that fatal day, and more in mind from the blow of such a defeat. His wife nursed and tended him with devotion though not in silence, for abuse of the navy and of seamen of every degree were as common in her mouth as the names of the saints in that of a bigot.

Doña Francisca was an excellent woman, of exemplary conduct and noble birth, devout and God-fearing—as all women were in those days, charitable and judicious, but with the most violent and diabolical temper I ever met with in the whole course of my life. Frankly I do not believe that this excessive irritability was natural to her, but the result and outcome of the worries in her life arising out of her

husband's much-hated profession; it must be confessed that she did not complain wholly without reason, and every day of her life Doña Francisca addressed her prayers to Heaven for the annihilation of every fleet in Europe. This worthy couple had but one child, a daughter—the incomparable Rosita, of whom more anon.

The veteran, however, pined sadly at Vejer, seeing his laurels covered with dust and gnawed to powder by the rats, and all his thoughts and most of his discourse, morning, noon, and night, were based on the absorbing theme that if Córdoba, the commander of the Spanish fleet, had only given the word “Starboard” instead of “Port” the good ships *Mejicano*, *San José*, *San Nicolás* and *San Isidro* would never have fallen into the hands of the English, and Admiral Jervis would have been defeated. His wife, Marcial, and even I myself, exceeding the limits of my duties—always assured him that there was no doubt of the fact, to see whether, if we acknowledged ourselves convinced, his vehemence would moderate—but no; his mania on that point only died with him.

Eight years had passed since that disaster, and the intelligence that the whole united fleet was to fight a decisive battle with the English had now roused my master to a feverish enthusiasm which seemed to have renewed his youth. He pictured to himself the inevitable rout of his mortal enemies; and although his wife tried to dissuade him, as has been said, it was impossible to divert him from his wild purpose. To prove how obstinate his determination was it is enough to mention that he dared to oppose his wife's strong will, though he avoided all discussion; and to give an adequate idea of all that his opposition implied I ought to mention that Don Alonso was afraid of no mortal thing or creature—neither of the English, the French, nor the savages of Magellan, not of the angry sea, nor of the monsters of the deep, nor of the raging tempest, nor of anything in the earth or sky—but only of his wife.

The last person I must mention is Marcial the sailor, the object of Doña Francisca's deepest aversion, though Don Alonso, under whom he had served, loved him as a brother.

Marcial—no one knew his other name—called by all the sailors "the Half a Man," had been boatswain on various men-of-war for forty years. At the time when my story begins this maritime hero's appearance was the strangest you can imagine. Picture to yourself an old man, tall rather than short, with a wooden leg, his left arm shortened to within a few inches of the elbow, minus an eye, and his face seamed with wounds in every direction—slashed by the various arms of the enemy; with his skin tanned brown, like that of all sea-faring men, and a voice so hoarse, hollow and slow, that it did not seem to belong to any rational human creature, and you have some idea of this eccentric personage. As I think of him I regret the narrow limits of my palette, for he deserves painting in more vivid colors and by a worthier artist. It was hard to say whether his appearance was most calculated to excite laughter or command respect—both at once I think, and according to the point of view you might adopt.

His life might be said to be an epitome of the naval history of Spain during the last years of the past century and the beginning of this—a history in whose pages the most splendid victories alternate with the most disastrous defeats. Marcial had served on board the *Conde de Regla*, the *San Joaquin*, the *Real Carlos*, the *Trinidad* and other glorious but unfortunate vessels which, whether honorably defeated or perfidiously destroyed, carried with them to a watery grave the naval power of Spain. Besides the expeditions in which my master had taken part Marcial had been present at many others, such as that of Martinica, the action of Cape Finisterre, and before that the terrible battle close to Algeciras in July, 1801, and that off Cape Santa María on the 5th of October, 1804. He quitted the service at sixty-six years of age, not however for lack of spirit but

because he was altogether “unmasted” and past fighting. On shore he and my master were the best of friends, and as the boatswain’s only daughter was married to one of the servants of the house, of which union a small child was the token, Marcial had made up his mind to cast anchor for good, like a hulk past service, and even succeeded in making himself believe that peace was a good thing. Only to see him you would have thought that the most difficult task that could be set to this grand relic of a hero was that of minding babies; but, as a matter of fact, Marcial had no other occupation in life than carrying and amusing his grandchild, putting it to sleep with his snatches of sea-songs, seasoned with an oath or two—excusable under the circumstances.

But no sooner had he heard that the united fleets were making ready for a decisive battle than his moribund fires rose from their ashes, and he dreamed that he was calling up the crew in the forecastle of the *Santísima Trinidad*. Discovering in Don Alfonso similar symptoms of rejuvenescence, he confessed to him, and from that hour they spent the chief part of the day and night in discussing the news that arrived and their own feelings in the matter; “fighting their battles o’er again,” hazarding conjectures as to those to be fought in the immediate future, and talking over their day-dreams like two ship’s boys indulging in secret visions of the shortest road to the title of Admiral.

In the course of these *tête-à-tête* meetings, which occasioned the greatest alarm to Doña Francisca, the plan was hatched for setting out to join the fleet and be present at the impending battle. I have already told the reader what my mistress’s opinion was and all the abuse she lavished on the insidious sailor; he knows too that Don Alonso persisted in his determination to carry out his rash purpose, accompanied by me, his trusty page, and I must now proceed to relate what occurred when Marcial himself

appeared on the scene to take up the cudgels for war against the shameful *status quo* of Doña Francisca.

CHAPTER IV.

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“Señor Marcial,” she began, with increased indignation, “if you choose to go to sea again and lose your other hand, you can go if you like; but my husband here, shall not.”

“Very good,” said the sailor who had seated himself on the edge of a chair, occupying no more space on it than was necessary to save himself from falling: “I will go alone. But the devil may take me if I can rest without looking on at the fun!”

Then he went on triumphantly: “We have fifteen ships and the French twenty smaller vessels. If they were all ours we should not want so many. Forty ships and plenty of brave hearts on board!”

Just as the spark creeps from one piece of timber to the next, the enthusiasm that fired Marcial’s one eye lighted up both my master’s, though dimmed by age. “But the *Señorito*” (Lord Nelson), added the sailor, “will bring up a great many men too. That is the sort of performance I enjoy: plenty of timbers to fire at, and plenty of gunpowder-smoke to warm the air when it is cold.”

I forgot to mention that Marcial, like most sailors, used a vocabulary of the most wonderful and mongrel character, for it seems to be a habit among seamen of every nation to disfigure their mother tongue to the verge of caricature. By examining the nautical terms used by sailors we perceive that most of them are corruptions of more usual terms, modified to suit their eager and hasty temperament trained by circumstances to abridge all the functions of existence and particularly speech. Hearing them talk it has sometimes occurred to me that sailors find the tongue an organ that they would gladly dispense with.

Marcial, for instance, turned verbs into nouns and nouns into verbs without consulting the authorities. He applied nautical terms to every action and movement, and identified the ideas of a man and a ship, fancying that there was some analogy between their limbs and parts. He would say in speaking of the loss of his eye that his larboard port-hole was closed, and explained the amputation of his arm by saying that he had been left minus his starboard cat-head. His heart he called his courage-hold and his stomach his bread-basket. These terms sailors at any rate could understand; but he had others, the offspring of his own inventive genius of which he alone understood the meaning or could appreciate the force. He had words of his own coining for doubting a statement, for feeling sad; getting drunk he always called “putting on your coat” among a number of other fantastical idioms; and the derivation of this particular phrase will never occur to my readers without my explaining to them that the English sailors had acquired among the Spaniards the nickname of “great-coats,” so that when he called getting drunk “putting your coat on” a recondite allusion was implied to the favorite vice of the enemy. He had the most extraordinary nicknames for foreign admirals; Nelson he called the *Señorito*, implying a certain amount of respect for him; Collingwood was *Rio Calambre*, (Uncle Cramp) which he believed to be an equivalent for the English name; Jervis he called—as the English did too—The old Fox; Calder was known as *Rio Perol* (Uncle Boiler) from an association of the name Calder with *caldera*, a kettle, and by an entirely different process he dubbed Villeneuve, the Admiral of the united fleets, with the name of *Monsieur Corneta*, borrowed from some play he had once seen acted at Madrid. In fact, when reporting the conversations I can recall, I must perforce translate his wonderful phraseology into more ordinary language, to avoid going into long and tiresome explanations.

To proceed, Doña Francisca, devoutly crossing herself, answered angrily:

“Forty ships! Good Heavens! it is tempting Providence; and there will be at least forty thousand guns for the enemies to kill each other.”

“Ah! but *Monsieur Corneta* keeps the courage-hold well filled!” exclaimed Marcial, striking his breast. “We shall laugh at the great-coats this time. It will not be Cape St. Vincent over again.”

“And you must not forget,” added my master eagerly recurring to his favorite hobby, “that if Admiral Córdova had only ordered the *San José* and the *Mejicano* to tack to port, Captain Jervis would not now be rejoicing in the title of Earl St. Vincent. Of that you may be very certain, and I have ample evidence to show that if we had gone to port the day would have been ours.”

“Ours!” exclaimed Doña Francisca scornfully. “As if you could have done more. To hear these fire-eaters it would seem as if they wanted to conquer the world, and as to going to sea—it appears that their shoulders are not broad enough to bear the blows of the English.”

“No,” said Marcial resolutely and clenching his fist defiantly. “If it were not for their cunning and knavery...! We got out against them with a bold front, defying them like men, with our flag hoisted and clean hands. The English never sail wide, they always steal up and surprise us, choosing heavy seas and stormy weather. That is how it was at the Straits, when we were made to pay so dearly. We were sailing on quite confidingly, for no one expected to be trapped even by a heretic dog of a Moor, much less by an Englishman who does the polite thing in a Christian fashion.—But no, an enemy who sneaks up to fight is not a Christian—he is a highwayman. Well now, just fancy, señora,” and he turned to Doña Francisca to engage her attention and goodwill, “we were going out of Cadiz to help the French fleet which was driven into Algeciras by the English.—It is four

years ago now, and to this day it makes me so angry that my blood boils as I think of it. I was on board the *Real Carlos*, 112 guns, commanded by Ezguerra, and we had with us the *San Hermenegildo*, 112 guns too, the *San Fernando*, the *Argonauta*, the *San Agustin*, and the frigate *Sabina*. We were joined by the French squadron of four men-of-war, three frigates and a brigantine, and all sailed out of Algeciras for Cadiz at twelve o'clock at noon; and as the wind was slack when night fell we were close under Punta Carnero. The night was blacker than a barrel of pitch, but the weather was fine so we could hold on our way in spite of the darkness. Most of the crew were asleep; I remember, I was sitting in the fo'castle talking to the mate, Pepe Débora, who was telling me all the dog's tricks his mother-in-law had played him, and alongside we could see the lights of the *San Hermenegildo*, which was sailing at a gun-shot to starboard. The other ships were ahead of us. For the very last thing we any of us thought of was that the 'great-coats' had slipped out of Gibraltar and were giving chase—and how the devil should we, when they had doused all their lights and were stealing up to us without our guessing it? Suddenly, for all that the night was so dark, I fancied I saw something—I always had a port-light like a lynx—I fancied a ship was standing between us and the *San Hermenegildo*, which was sailing at a gun-shot to starboard. 'José Débora,' says I, 'either I saw a ghost or there is an Englishman to starboard?' José Débora looks himself, and then he says: 'May the main-mast go by the board,' says he, 'if there is e'er a ship to starboard but the *San Hermenegildo*.' 'Well,' says I, 'whether or no I am going to tell the officer of the watch.'

"Well hardly were the words out of my mouth when, rub-a-dub! we heard the tune of a whole broadside that came rattling against our ribs. The crew were on deck in a minute, and each man at his post. That was a rumpus, señora! I wish you could have been there, just to have an idea of how

these things are managed. We were all swearing like demons and at the same time praying the Lord to give us a gun at the end of every finger to fight them with. Ezguerra gave the word to return their broadside.—Thunder and lightning! They fired again, and in a minute or two we responded. But in the midst of all the noise and confusion we discovered that with their first broadside they had sent one of those infernal combustibles (but he called it ‘comestibles’) on board which fall on the deck as if it were raining fire. When we saw our ship was burning we fought like madmen and fired off broadside after broadside. Ah! Doña Francisca, it was hot work I can tell you!—Then our captain took us alongside of the enemy’s ship that we might board her. I wish you could have seen it! I was in my glory then; in an instant we had our axes and boarding-pikes out, the enemy was coming down upon us and my heart jumped for joy to see it, for this was the quickest way of settling accounts. On we go, right into her!—Day was just beginning to dawn, the yards were touching, and the boarding parties ready at the gangways when we heard Spanish oaths on board the foe. We all stood dumb with horror, for we found that the ship we had been fighting with was the *San Hermenegildo* herself.”

“That was a pretty state of things,” said Doña Francisca roused to some interest in the narrative. “And how had you been such asses—with not a pin to choose between you?”

“I will tell you. We had no time for explanations then. The flames on our ship went over to the *San Hermenegildo* and then, Blessed Virgin! what a scene of confusion. ‘To the boats!’ was the cry. The fire caught the *Santa Bárbara* and her ladyship blew up with loud explosion.—We were all swearing, shouting, blaspheming God and the Virgin and all the Saints, for that seems the only way to avoid choking when you are primed to fight, up to the very muzzle....”

“Merciful Heavens how shocking!” cried my mistress. “And you escaped?”

"Forty of us got off in the launch and six or seven in the gig, these took up the second officer of the *San Hermenegildo*. José Débora clung to a piece of plank and came to shore at Morocco, more dead than alive."

"And the rest?"

"The rest—the sea was wide enough to hold them all. Two thousand men went down to Davy Jones that day, and among them our captain, Ezguerra, and Emparan, the captain of the other ship."

"Lord have mercy on them!" ejaculated Doña Francisca. "Though God knows! they were but ill-employed to be snatched away to judgment. If they had stayed quietly at home, as God requires...."

"The cause of that disaster," said Don Alonso, who delighted in getting his wife to listen to these dramatic narratives, "was this: The English emboldened by the darkness arranged that the *Superb*, the lightest of their vessels, should extinguish her lights and slip through between our two finest ships. Having done this, she fired both her broadsides and then put about as quickly as possible to escape the struggle that ensued. The two men-of-war, finding themselves unexpectedly attacked, returned fire and thus went on battering each other till dawn, when, just as they were about to board, they recognized each other and the end came as Marcial has told you in detail."

"Ah! and they played the game well," cried the lady. "It was well done though it was a mean trick!"

"What would you have?" added Marcial. "I never loved them much; but since that night!... If *they* are in Heaven I do not want ever to go there. Sooner would I be damned to all eternity!"

"Well—and then the taking of the four frigates which were coming from Rio de la Plata?" asked Don Alfonso, to incite the old sailor to go on with his stories.

"Aye—I was at that too," said Marcial. "And that was where I left my leg. That time too they took us unawares,

and as it was in time of peace we were sailing on quietly enough, only counting the hours till we should be in port, when suddenly—— I will tell you exactly how it all happened, Doña Francisca, that you may just understand the ways of those people. After the engagement at the Straits I embarked on board the *Fama* for Montevideo, and we had been out there a long time when the Admiral of the squadron received orders to convoy treasure from Lima and Buenos Ayres to Spain. The voyage was a good one and we had no mishaps but a few slight cases of fever which only killed off a few of our men. Our freight was heavy—gold belonging to the king and to private persons, and we also had on board what we called the ‘wages chest’—savings off the pay of the troops serving in America. Altogether, if I am not much mistaken, a matter of fifty millions or so of *pesos*, as if it were a mere nothing; and besides that, wolf-hides, vicuña wool, cascarilla, pigs of tin and copper, and cabinet woods. Well, sir, after sailing for fifty days we sighted land on the 5th of October, and reckoned on getting into Cadiz the next day when, bearing down from the northeast, what should we see but four frigates. Although, as I said, it was in time of peace, and though our captain, Don Miguel de Zapiain, did not seem to have any suspicion of evil, I—being an old sea-dog—called Débora and said to him that there was powder in the air, I could smell it. Well, when the English frigates were pretty near, we cleared the decks for action; the *Fama* went forward and we were soon within a cable’s length of one of the English ships which lay to windward.

“The English captain hailed us through his speaking-trumpet and told us—there is nothing like plain-speaking—told us to prepare to defend ourselves, as he was going to attack. He asked a string of questions, but all he got out of us was that we should not take the trouble to answer him. Meanwhile the other three frigates had come up and had