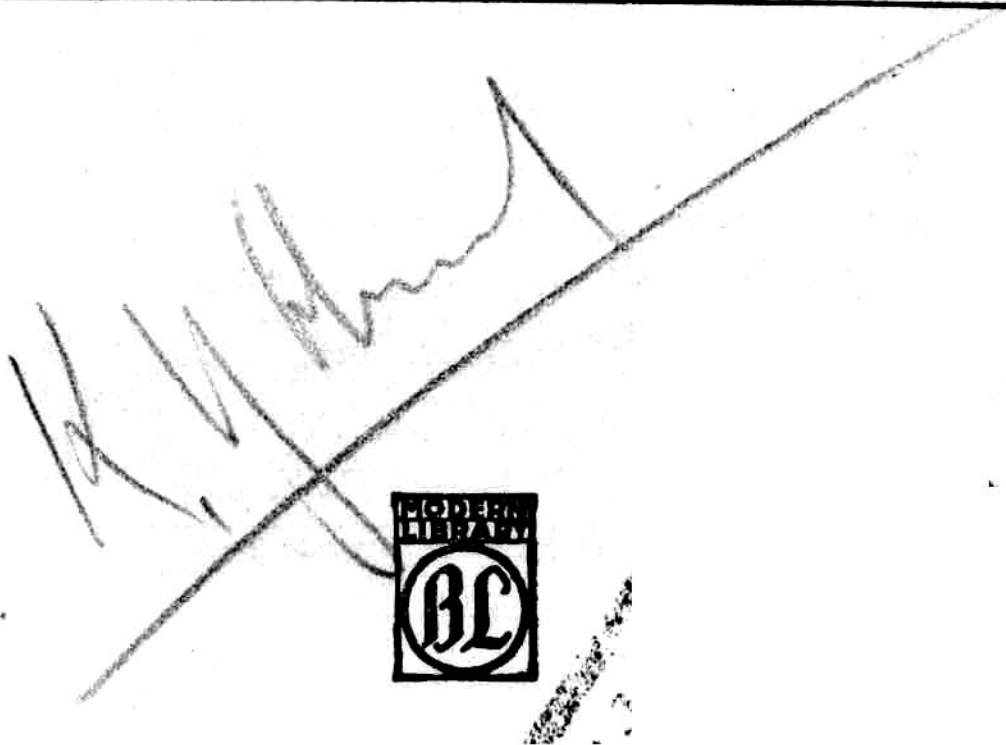




THE CABIN

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INTRODUCTION

Señor Blasco Ibáñez has asked me to say a few words by way of introduction to *The Cabin* which shall be both simple and true.

He has watched with conflicting emotions the reception of his words in this country—pleasure as he has realized the warmth of their welcome and the general consensus of critical approval, pleasure not unmixed with other feelings as he has read the notices in which these opinions have been expressed and the accounts of his career which have accompanied them. Few writers during the past twenty years have lived so much in the public eye; the facts of his life are accessible and clear. Then why invent new ones? "It is necessary," he writes, "to correct all this, to give an account of my life which shall be accurate and authentic, and which shall not lead the public into further error."

Why is the American press entirely ignorant in matters pertaining to Spain? It is guiltless even of the shadow of learning. Not one editor in the United States knows anything about the intellectual life of the peninsula. Why print as information the veriest absurdities? A liberal use of the word *perhaps* is not a substitute for good faith with the reader. Here

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is one of the great dramatic literatures of the world, which by common consent is unrivalled except by the English and the Greek, which to-day is as vigorous as it ever was in its Golden Age during the seventeenth century, yet a fastidious and reputable review published in this city is able to say when the plays of Benavente are first translated in this country, that it "feels that Jacinto Benavente has dramatic talent." Dramatic talent!—a man who has revolutionized the theatre of a race, and whose works are the intellectual pride of tens of millions of people over two continents? Ignorance ceases to be ridiculous at a certain point and becomes criminal. The Irishman who perpetrated this bull should be deported for it. Again, Spain has produced the greatest novel of all time in *Don Quixote*, she has originated the modern realistic novel, yet the publications may be counted upon the fingers of one hand which can command the services of a reviewer who is able even to name the two leading Spanish novelists of to-day, much less to distinguish Pío Baroja from Blasco Ibáñez or Ricardo León. This condition must cease, or it will become wilful.

The author of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* is not a regional novelist.

He is not a literary disciple of the late Don Juan Valera.

He is not a literary anarchist, nor a follower of the Catalan Ferrer.

He has not reformed Spain.

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He is not associated with a group of novelists or other writers who have done so.

Had this desirable end been attained, and attained through the efforts of a novelist, that novelist would have been Don Benito Pérez Galdós.

The author of *The Cabin* cannot in modesty accept of foreigners the laurels of all the writers of Spain. The Spanish is an ancient, complex, strongly characteristic civilization, of which he happily is a product. It is his hope that Americans may become some day better acquainted with the spirit and rich heritage of a great national literature through his pages. As his works have long been translated into Russian and have been familiar for many years in French, perhaps it is not too early to anticipate the attention of the enterprising American public.

Unfortunately standards of translation do not exist in this country. Many believe that there is no such thing as translation, that the essence of a book cannot be conveyed. The professor seizes his dictionary, the lady tourist her pen; the ingenious publisher knows that none is so low that he will not translate—the less the experience, the more the translator, a maxim in the application of which Blasco Ibáñez has suffered appalling casualties. When *Sangre y arena* ("Blood and Sand") comes from the press as *The Blood of the Arena*, the judicious pause—this is to thunder on the title page, not in the index—but when we meet the eunuch of Sónnica transformed into an "old crone," error passes the bounds of decency and

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deserves punishment which is callipygian. Nor are these translations worse than their fellows.

Blunders of this sort ought no longer to be possible. If American scholarship is not a sham, this reform, which is imperative, must be immediate.

Blasco Ibáñez was born in Valencia, that most typical of the cities of the eastern littoral along the Mediterranean, known as the Spanish Levant. The Valencian dialect is directly affiliated with the neighboring Catalan. and through it with the Provençal rather than with the Castilian of the interior plateau. In the character of the people there is a facility which suggests the French, while an oriental element is distinctly evident, persisting not only from the days of the Moorish kingdoms, but eloquent of the shipping of the East and the *lingua franca* of the inland sea. Blasco Ibáñez is a Levantine touched with a suggestion of Cyprus, of Alexandria, with an adaptability and mobility of temperament which have endowed him with a faculty of literary improvisation which is extraordinary. He has been a novelist, a controversialist, a politician, a member of the Cortes, a republican, an orator, a traveller, an expatriate, a ranchman, a duellist, a journalist. "He writes," says the Argentine Manuel Ugarte, "as freely as other men talk. This is the secret of the freshness and charm of the unforgettable pages of *The Cabin*, of the sense of fraternity and *camaraderie* which springs up immediately, uniting the author and his readers. He seems to be telling us a story between cigarettes

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at the café table. In these times when mankind is shaking itself free from stupid snobbery to return to nature and to simple sincerity, this gift of free and lucid expression is the highest of merits."

Ibáñez's first stories dealt with the life of the Valencian plain, whose marvellous fertility has become proverbial:

"Valencia is paradise;
Wheat to-day, to-morrow rice."

Swift with the movement of the born story-teller and the vitality of a mind which is always at white heat, these tales are remarkable for vivid descriptive power in which each successive picture conveys an impression of the subject so intense that it seems plastic. He is a painter of sunshine, not as it idly falls on the slumberous streets of the Andalusian cities, but turbulent with the surging of the spirit, welling up and pressing on.

In the novel of a more intellectual, introspective feature, he has also met with rare success, as Mr. Howells has well shown in one of the few articles upon this author in English which are of value. The vein is more complex but not less copious, remaining instinct with power. It is indeed less national, an excursion into the processes of the northern mind. Ibáñez, however, was never an æsthete; no phase of art could detain him long. He sailed for Argentina to deliver a series of lectures on national themes at a time when Anatole France was upholding the Gallic

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tradition in that country. Argentine life attracted him and he became a ranchman on the Pampas, bought an American motor tractor, and settled down to create the Argentine novel. South America, it must be confessed, for some reason has been incontinently unproductive of great novels, nor was Ibáñez to find its atmosphere more propitious than it had proved to its native sons. Besides, the Spaniards, who are a religious people, were praying for his return. He took ship as suddenly as he had arrived and has since resided chiefly at Paris, a city which has been to him from early youth a second home.

In the cosmopolitan vortex of the great war capital, he has interpreted the spirit of the vast world conflict in terms of the imagination with a breadth and force of appeal such as has been given, perhaps, to no other man. While Spain has remained neutral, under compulsion of material conditions which those who best understand her will appreciate at their true weight, in a single volume Ibáñez has been able to abrogate this neutrality of the land, and to marshal his people publically where their heart has always been secretly, in line with the progressive opinion of the world.

If in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* he has rendered his greatest service to humanity, in *The Cabin* he has made his chief contribution to art. It is the most nicely rounded of his stories, the most perfect. Spanish and Latin-American opinion is here unanimous. Nevertheless, primarily it is a human

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document. Rubén Darío, than whom, certainly, none is better qualified to speak, emphasizes this crusading bias: "The soul of a gladiator, a robust teller of tales *à la* Zola is externalized in *The Cabin*. The creative flood proceeds without faltering with a rapidity of invention which proclaims the riches of the source. Books such as this are not written purely for love of art, they embody profound human aspirations. They are beautiful pages not only, but generous deeds and apostolic exploits as well." The ambient blends admirably with the action and the characters to present a picture which is satisfying and which appeals to the eye as complete. *The Cabin* is a rarely visual story, and directly so, affording in this respect an interesting contrast to the imaginative suggestion of the present-day Castilian realists. In no other work has the author combined so effectively the broad swish of his valiant style with the homely, even crass detail which lends it significance. "A book like this," to quote Iglesias Hermida, "is written only once in a life-time, and one book like this is sufficient."

A favorite anecdote of Blasco Ibáñez is so illuminative that it deserves to be told in his own words:

"When I go to the Bull Ring, as I do from time to time with a foreigner, I enjoy the polychromatic animated spectacle of the crowded amphitheatre, the theatric entrance of the fighters and the encounters with the first bull. The second diverts me less, at the third I begin to yawn, and when the fourth appears, I reach for the book or newspaper which I have forehandedly brought along in my pocket. And

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I suspect that half of the spectators feel very much as I do.

“A number of years ago a professor in one of the celebrated universities of the United States came to visit me at Madrid, and I took him, as is customary, to see a bull-fight.

“This learned gentleman was also a man of action, a Roosevelt of the professorial chair; he rode, he boxed, he was devoted to hunting big game as well as to the exploration of unknown lands. He watched intently every incident of the fight, knitting his blond eyebrows above his spectacles—for he was near-sighted—as he did so. Occasionally he muttered a word of approbation: ‘Very good!’ ‘Truly interesting!’ I saw, however, that some new, original idea was crystallizing in his mind.

“When we came out, he expressed himself:

“‘Very interesting entertainment, but somewhat monotonous. Would it not be better to turn the six bulls loose simultaneously and then kill them all at once? It might shorten the exhibition, but how much more exciting! It would give those chaps an opportunity to show off their courage.’

“I looked upon that Yankee as upon a great sage. He had formulated definitely the vague dissatisfaction with the bull-fight which had lurked in my mind ever since, as a boy, I had suffered at the tiresome spectacle. Yes! Six bulls at one time!”

In the novel of Blasco Ibáñez, it is always six bulls at one time.

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THE CABIN

I

THE vast plain stretched out under the blue splendour of dawn, a broad sash of light which appeared in the direction of the sea.

The last nightingales, tired of animating with their songs this autumn night, which seemed like spring in the balminess of its atmosphere, poured forth their final warble, as if the light of dawn wounded them with its steely reflections.

Flocks of sparrows arose like crowds of pursued urchins from the thatched roofs of the farmhouses, and the tops of the trees trembled at the first assault of these gamins of the air, who stirred up everything with the flurry of their feathers.

The sounds which fill the night had gradually died away: the babbling of the canals, the murmur of the cane-plantations, the bark of the watchful dog.

The *huerta* was awaking, and its yawnings were growing ever noisier. The crowing of the cock was carried on from farm-house to farm-house; the bells of the village were answering, with noisy peals, the ringing of the first mass which floated from the towers of Valencia, blue and hazy in the distance. From the corrals came a discordant animal-concert; the whinnying of horses, the lowing of gentle cows, the clucking of hens, the bleating of lambs, the grunting of pigs, . . . all the noisy awakening of creatures who, upon feeling the first caress of dawn, permeated with the pungent perfume of vegetation, long to be off and run about the fields.

Space became saturated with light; the shadows dissolved as though swallowed up by the open furrows and the masses of foliage; and in the hazy mist of dawn, humid and shining rows of mulberry-trees, waving lines of cane-brake, large square beds of garden vegetables like enormous green handkerchiefs, and the carefully tilled red earth, became gradually more and more defined.

Along the high-road there came creeping rows of moveable black dots, strung out like files of

ants, all marching toward the city. From all the ends of the *vega*, resounded the creaking of wheels mingled with idle songs interrupted by shouts urging on the beasts; and from time to time, like the sonorous heralding of dawn, the air was rent by the furious braying of the donkey protesting so to speak against the heavy labour which fell upon him with break of day.

Along the canals, the glassy sheet of ruddy crystal was disturbed by noisy plashings and loud beating of wings which silenced the frogs as the ducks advanced like galleys of ivory, moving their serpentine necks like fantastic prows.

The plain was flooded with light, and life penetrated into the interior of the farm-houses.

Doors creaked as they opened; under the grape-arbours white figures could be seen, which upon awakening stretched out, hands clasped behind their heads, and gazed toward the illumined horizon.

The stables stood with doors wide-open, vomiting forth a stream of milch-cows, herds of goats, and the nags of the cart-drivers, all bound for the city. From behind the screen of dwarfish trees which concealed the road, came the jingle

of cow-bells, while mingling with their gay notes, there sounded the shrill *arre, aca!*¹ urging on the stubborn beasts.

At the doorways of the farm-houses stood those who were city-bound and those who remained to work in the fields, saluting each other.

May the Lord give us a good-day!

Good-day!

And after this salutation, exchanged with all the gravity of country folk who carry the blood of Moors in their veins, and who speak the name of God only with solemn gesture, silence fell again if the passer-by were one unknown; but if he were an intimate, he was commissioned with the purchase, in Valencia, of small objects for the house or wife.

The day had now completely dawned.

The air was already cleared of the tenuous mist that rose during the night from the damp fields and the noisy canals. The sun was coming out; in the ruddy furrows the larks hopped about with the joy of living one day more, and the mischievous sparrows, alighting at the still-closed windows, pecked away at the wood, chirp-

¹ Get up!

ing to those within, with the shrill cry of the vagabond used to living at the expense of others:

“Up, you lazy drones! Work in the fields so we may eat!”

Pepeta, wife of Toni, known throughout the neighbourhood as Pimentó, had just entered their *barraca*. She was a courageous creature, and despite her pale flesh, wasted white by anaemia while still in full youth, the most hard working woman in the entire *huerta*.¹

At daybreak, she was already returning from market. She had risen at three, loaded herself with the baskets of garden-truck gathered by Toni the night before, and groping for the paths while she cursed the vile existence in which she was worked so hard, had guided herself like a true daughter of the *huerta* through the darkness to Valencia. Meanwhile her husband, that good fellow who was costing her so dearly, continued to snore in the warm bed-chamber, bundled in the matrimonial blankets.

The wholesalers who bought the vegetables were well acquainted with this woman, who,

¹ A *huerta* is a cultivated district divided usually into tiny, fertile, truck-garden and fruit farms.