

## Speech at the «Mare Nostrum» School

May 16<sup>th</sup> 1921

Valencians, my friends:

One of the greatest satisfactions a writer can feel is to see the title of one of his books given not to a street, not to an ostentatious monument, but to a school, to what, as my friend Llagaria told you before, represents the future, which is like a temple of future generations: it is, in a word, the place where the soul is moulded, where the character of the Spain of the future is moulded.

I accept this designation with pleasure, not because of my novel, because my novel has been nothing more than a book that has sought a label, that has sought a title in one of the manifestations that we can say are geographical and that most profoundly affect our history, the history of our people.

You all know what “Mare Nostrum” is. “Mare Nostrum” is the Mediterranean, it is our sea. We, gentlemen, are Spanish because we belong to Spain and because we love Spain and because we wish it all kinds of prosperity and glory.

But apart from our Spanish nationality, we have a less concrete, more vigorous, more ideal nationality, one that exists many times; we are Mediterranean.

I can tell you (because I am a great traveller) that I have travelled all over that sea you see there. I have seen the coasts of Italy, the coasts of Provence; I know Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor; I know Egypt, I know Tunisia, Africa and Morocco: that is to say, all the contours of that sea which has been compared to a “sack” with the Straits of Gibraltar as its mouth and all the coasts of Asia as its bottom.

I can tell you that when I have travelled around the Mediterranean I have found Valencia everywhere. To be more specific: I have found Grao and Cabañal everywhere. In all the ports of the Mediterranean you see the same dark man, with an intelligent face, and the same women with large eyes and pale complexion that you see in Valencia; and you see above all the same propensity for art. On all the shores of the Mediterranean, if art did not exist, they would invent it all over again.

For you see that every sailor and every fisherman who does not travel, when they are on the beach, instinctively begin to trace figures in the sand, copying the artistic lines of everything around them. You see on all the beaches of the Mediterranean that when they paint the boats, the same artistic sense of the ancient Greeks, who built their triremes (three oared galley ship), comes to the fore.

You see how, when they build their houses, their own houses, they have something of those ships that for centuries and centuries have plied the Mediterranean, carrying civilisation.

I say to you, gentlemen, that I am proud to be Spanish, because Spain discovered half the planet and also circumnavigated the entire universe. It was the first country to demonstrate the roundness of the earth.

But at the same time I am proud to be Mediterranean, because this “Mare Nostrum”, on whose shores we live, is simply the history of civilisation. Man began to become civilised on the shores of this sea. Man learns and sails and spreads his sails to the wind on this sea.

Do you know why we are declining? Do you know why we are in second place at the moment? Because we Mediterranean men are the aristocracy of humanity.

We have been great for so many centuries that mankind cannot be led by the Mediterranean for forty centuries and now richer, more powerful nations have entered, but they do not have our ancestry nor can they present a great history of civilisation like ours.

Everything has come from here.

The world is still thinking, after three thousand years, just as a small republic of seafarers at the bottom of the Mediterranean began to dream and sing; poor people who fed on olives and dried fish, but who at the same time possessed the most powerful brain known in history.

You have all understood that I am speaking of the republic of Greece and especially of that immortal Athens.

From the depths of the Mediterranean has come the thought that is still ruminating the most powerful civilisation of the present age.

No epic poet has gone beyond Homer; no dramatist beyond Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. No poet has gone beyond Pindar; no satirist beyond Aristophanes.

All philosophers, all philosophy today, is based on what was philosophised by those men who walked the porticoes of Athens and were called Socrates and Aristotle: men who constituted the immense plethora of thinkers who make up Greek philosophy.

In the same way, gentlemen, all the religions that exist today all come from the three monotheistic religions that have arisen from the Mediterranean: Judaism, Christianity and Mohammedanism, which are also three Mediterranean religions.

Everything that exists comes from the “Mare Nostrum”, comes from our sea.

Great modern civilisations, powerful, gigantic, like the United States, when they look back, they bow with the humility of the disciple, recognising that the Mediterranean has been the sea from which all the masters of the earth have come.

You do well to found a school by the name of “Mare Nostrum”.

I wish you all the prosperity, all the Mediterranean wisdom, the Mediterranean good sense, the love of arts and letters of all that constitutes the spirit of the modern men of the “Mare Nostrum”, which a few years ago the blond men of the North dreamed would end them forever; This Mediterranean Sea, which is the sea of the arts, but which, when it needs men of war, produces a son of the Balearic Islands, whose name was Hannibal, and another son of a lawyer without lawsuits, from Corsica, whose name was Napoleon Bonaparte; this Mediterranean Sea which produces everything, even the men of war that history knows; this Mediterranean Sea, is the same one in which this school that we are inaugurating today is placed under its protection.

I come from a country, gentlemen - I am referring especially to the teachers who are listening to me - a country which is not only great because it is the most powerful nation on earth, as an agricultural power, and the most powerful nation as an industrial power, but it is also great because it is the country which devotes the most money to education. Which provides the greatest means for education and does not provide it like us, poor backward nations, which need government or official corporations to subsidise education, because it seems that we are afraid that if the government does not subsidise it, private individuals will not attend to it; On the contrary, in the United States, in North America, it is the private individual who supports education.

Apart from the elementary schools supported by the municipalities, there are 500 universities in the United States, and these universities are like casinos. That is to say, one or two thousand individuals pay a monthly fee to support universities which is immense. There you will see what education means for modern countries, what science, education, all the knowledge spread, not within the reach of a special class, which becomes a kind of mandate within society, but spread throughout the world, because human beings, just as they have the right to air to breathe and the sun to warm their limbs, have the right to education, science and art to enrich their souls and to make their lives more enjoyable.

I, gentlemen, am going to finish. Every time I attend a school inauguration, I look at the teachers and an image comes to mind, the image of a river and its banks.

The river is humanity. Imagine generations and generations of children following each other like the waters of a river. You, the teachers, are the banks. You are motionless. The streams of humanity pass between you; the generations succeed one another and you channel those generations and give them course.

Imagine what you represent for the future. I am well aware that, unfortunately for our country, you do not occupy the place you ought to occupy.

In a well-constituted country, the man who writes novels and the man who writes books of science, and everyone who produces, should produce at night. And do you know what we should all be by day? We should all be schoolmasters.

That would be a well-organised nation,

Unfortunately we are not there yet.

The schoolmaster, who here is not cared for as he should be, occupies a high rank in society there, for he has a duty, a duty of immense importance to perform.

The future, the future society, will be what the present schoolmaster wants it to be.

I used to listen with great pleasure to the explanation which the speaker who spoke to you before, with such eloquence, made to you against excessive kindness.

I believe the same thing. I believe that, as in the great democracies, we must be obedient and subordinate when an agreement has already been reached, when there is the agreement of the majority for the establishment of a law; but until that moment arrives, we must discuss, we must examine things. We have to be, in a certain way, a little rebellious, in order to finally achieve what is considered by the majority to be the most beneficial for all.

I wish you, children, all of you who are listening to me; I wish you, teachers; I wish all the inhabitants of this Mediterranean city, that this school may in the future be something that honours not the poor book that served it, not the poor writer who wrote it, but this “Mare Nostrum”, which is one of the greatest titles in universal history.