

## Speech at “la Barraca” Street

May 17<sup>th</sup> 1921

Dear friends, it will not be something new for you if I say that coming here I feel like I am in the bosom of my family. Who as an inhabitant of Poblados Marítimos does not know me and my love for all of you?

I am Valencian, born in the city, but I have spent most of my life with you, next to this beautiful Mediterranean Sea. What’s more, the only house I own in the world, the house I built, is here, in the Malvarrosa.

I have always returned to this town; many times I came here to take part in events in favour of my political ideals. Today I come as an artist, as a literary producer who put his pen to the service of generous ideals, of spiritual vagueness, and also to the service of concrete ideals in describing this Valencian land which is the most beautiful in the world.

It is so beautiful, so overwhelming and attractive that it becomes a danger to the soul of Valencian artists.

When I heard the immortal verses of Teodoro Llorente, I remembered his great love for Valencia; he loved it as much or more than I did; he loved it so much that he never wanted to leave here, contenting himself with the humble glory of his Valencia. He could have conquered glory all over the world if he had left.

I remember when the venerable patriarch of Valencian letters was a monarchist deputy, I was a republican deputy, and when we were in Madrid, in the afternoons, fleeing from the hall of sessions, he would look for me and say to me in Valencian: “What are we doing here? I’m bored. Let’s go back to Valencia, to see the beach and the sun”.

And Llorente, an old man full of prudence, and I, a young man full of impetus, felt the same desire to return to this land of light and poetry to live Valencian life to the full.

If they buried me in a distant country, I would die forever, I wanted them to bring me here, by the Mediterranean, and so I will never die because my body will come to mingle with this land of Valencia that inspired my most beloved works.

Those of us who find ourselves at a mature age, in “the middle of life’s journey”, as Dante sang, we review our past life and look back at what we have achieved. What have we done? We feel the doubt of not having done everything we should have done; of not having contributed to the patriotic treasure all that we should have because Valencia is for the artists who were born here like the sirens that Homer tells us in his Iliad: with their songs they

filled with illusion the souls of the sailors who sailed the seas and in love with those sweet songs interrupted their voyages.

Thus Llorente, who was an immense poet, stayed here forever, attracted by the beauties of this incomparable land.

And I too would have stayed here if the vagaries of life had not torn me with their rude pull from the charms of those sirens.

I have lived away from this land, but always feeling its nostalgia; always remembering it; and when I travelled through distant lands covered with snow; through others where the orange tree blooms or the palm tree raises the green fountain of its palms, I think with anguish that if I died there, they would bury me in that distant land.

When I examine my past, what I have done and what I have to do, I feel a great doubt, but there is one consolation in it: that I have contributed my work to the dissemination of Valencia throughout the world.

When I walked through the streets of the cities of the United States, England and France; I saw in the windows of the bookshops the translations of *La barraca*, *Flor de mayo* and *Cañas y barro*, those novels that I wrote for you, as something intimate and familiar, and which have been translated into the first languages of the world. And before them I thought to myself: for a boy who was born in the Calle de la Jabonería Nueva and who is Valencian, life has not been bad.

I have a contract with a New York publisher to publish alternately a new novel of mine and another of the ones I first wrote, translated into English. Now it's the turn of *Flor de mayo*, which I wrote in 96 or 97, when I was twenty-three or twenty-four, and this novel of mine has been taken up by the most notable critics. When I read their articles I felt a great emotion when I saw in those paragraphs in English words like these: “Cabañal, Cañamelar, la tía Picores, la pescadora de Valencia” (Cabañal, Cañamelar, Aunt Picores, the fisherwoman of Valencia). With great satisfaction I saw that my words were helping to make the popular types of Valencia known all over the world!

I will continue this work, because I am very Spanish, but my love goes beyond the Mediterranean, towards all men.

I love Valencia, I want its splendour; it does not matter that I am a man of progress to be an enthusiast for the glories of Valencia, which will attain all the greatness to which it is entitled because it is a people of artists, because the Valencians worship beauty from their earliest years and feel as strong a predisposition for art as they do love for freedom and progress.

I am not a retrograde spirit who opposes progress and wants to preserve the old dwellings for the Valencians forever, who should live in comfortable houses with bathrooms; but progress is not a reason to forget the glorious past of Valencia, and the memory of these dwellings, which represent a piece of Valencia's art, which should not disappear from our memory.

I am a man of the future, but I do not want the dwellings to be lost.

Valencia is a town of artists; the farm women wore silks and brocades and were not content to drink from coarse clay and enriched it with the majolica glaze of our artistic ceramics.

Let us follow our path of progress and freedom, but let us be respectful of the artistic past of our land.

Valencia will not end tomorrow, because when Sorolla, Benlliure and I, who have taken our art all over the world, disappear; a generation of artists more illustrious than us will emerge.

And to finish; I am going to address a plea to all the friends who are here. If I were to die somewhere else, would you bring me here?

I want to rest in the most modest Valencian cemetery, next to the “mare nostrum” that filled my spirit with ideals; I want my body to be fused with this land of Valencia, which is the love of all my loves.