Once the Malavoglia were as numerous as the stones on the old road to Trezza; there were some even at Ognino and at Aci Castello, and good and brave seafaring folk, quite the opposite of what they might appear to be from their nickname of the Ill-wills, as is but right. In fact, in the parish books they were called Toscani; but that meant nothing, because, since the world was a world, at Ognino, at Trezza, and at Aci Castello they had been known as Malavoglia, from father to son, who had always had boats on the water and tiles in the sun. Now at Trezza there remained only Padron ’Ntoni and his family, who owned the *Provvidenza*, which was anchored in the sand below the washing-tank by the side of Uncle Cola’s *Concetta* and Padron Fortunato Cipolla’s bark. The tempests, which had scattered all the other Malavoglia to the four winds, had passed over the house by the medlar-tree and the boat anchored under the tank without doing any great damage; and Padron ’Ntoni, to explain the miracle, used to say, showing his closed fist, a fist which looked as if it were made of walnut wood, “To pull a good oar the five fingers must help one another.” He also said, “Men are like the fingers of the hand—the thumb must be the thumb, and the little finger the little finger.”

And Padron ’Ntoni’s little family was really disposed like the fingers of a hand. First, he came—the thumb—who ordered the fasts and the feasts in the house; then Bastian, his son, called Bastianazzo because he was as big and as grand as the Saint Christopher which was painted over the arch of the fish-market in town; and big and grand as he was, he went right about at the word of command, and wouldn’t have blown his nose unless his father had told him to do it. So he took to wife La Longa when his father said to him “Take her!” Then came La Longa, a little woman who attended to her weaving, her salting of anchovies, and her babies, as a good house-keeper should do; last, the grandchildren in the order of their age—’Ntoni, the eldest, a big fellow of twenty, who was always getting cuffs from his grandfather, and then kicks a little farther down if the cuffs had been heavy enough to disturb his equilibrium; Luca, “who had more sense than the big one,” the grandfather said; Mena (Filomena), surnamed Sant’Agata, because she was always at the loom, and the proverb goes, “Woman at the loom, hen in the coop, and mullet in January;” Alessio, our urchin, that was his grandfather all over; and Lia (Rosalia), as yet neither fish nor flesh. On Sunday, when they went into church one after another, they looked like a procession.

Padron ’Ntoni was in the habit of using certain proverbs and sayings of old times, for, said he, the sayings of the ancients never lie: “Without a pilot the boat won’t go;” “To be pope one must begin by being sacristan,” or, “Stick to the trade you know, somehow you’ll manage to go;” “Be content to be what your father was, then you’ll be neither a knave nor an ass,” and other wise saws. Therefore the house by the medlar was prosperous, and Padron ’Ntoni passed for one of the weighty men of the village, to that extent that they would have made him a communal councillor. Only Don Silvestro, the town-clerk, who was very knowing, insisted that he was a rotten *codino*, a reactionary who went in for the Bourbons, and conspired for the return of Franceschello, that he might tyrannize over the village as he tyrannized over his own house. Padron ’Ntoni, instead, did not even know Franceschello by sight, and used to say, “He who has the management of a house cannot sleep when he likes, for he who commands must give account.” In December, 1863, ’Ntoni, the eldest grandson, was called up for the naval conscription. Padron ’Ntoni had recourse to the big-wigs of the village, who are those who can help us if they like. But Don Giammaria, the vicar, replied that he deserved it, and that it was the fruit of that satanic revolution which they had made, hanging that tricolored handkerchief to the campanile. Don Franco, the druggist, on the other hand, laughed under his beard, and said it was quite time there should be a revolution, and that then they would send all those fellows of the draft and the taxes flying, and there would be no more soldiers, but everybody would go out and fight for their country if there was need of it. Then Padron ’Ntoni begged and prayed him, for the love of God, to make the revolution quickly, before his grandson ’Ntoni went for a soldier, as if Don Franco had it in his pocket, so that at last the druggist flew into a rage. Then Don Silvestro, the town-clerk, dislocated his jaws with laughter at the talk, and finally he said that by means of certain little packets, slipped into certain pockets that he knew of, they might manage to get his nephew found defective in some way, and sent back for a year. Unfortunately, the doctor, when he saw the tall youth, told him that his only defect was to be planted like a column on those big ugly feet, that looked like the leaves of a prickly-pear, but such feet as that would be of more use on the deck of ah iron-clad in certain rough times that were coming than pretty small ones in tight boots; and so he took ’Ntoni, without saying “by your leave.” La Longa, when the conscripts went up to their quarters, trotted breathless by the side of her long-legged son, reminding him that he must always remember to keep round his neck the piece of the Madonna’s dress that she had given him, and to send home news whenever any one came that way that he knew, and she would give him money to buy paper.