

THE SPANISH REPUBLIC

IT is idle yet to discuss the prospects of the second Spanish Republic; it is impossible to predict whether it will have as short a life as the first Republic of 1873. This lies not in the new form of government, but in the whole instability of Spanish politics. Before the April Revolution I was of the opinion that it was impossible to take Spanish politics seriously, an opinion which, to my mind, constituted no insult to the Spanish people. Though still persisting in that view, I will admit that recent events make the holding of it perhaps unfair. One thing now emerges as definite; there is no lack of political earnestness among a number of the people, but how large this number really is appears a matter of conjecture.

I was recently discussing the new Spanish situation with a friend who is an authority on everything Spanish. The conversation turned from Spain to the rest of Europe, and I remarked that Germany was a country I much admired. 'Spain is a country one cannot admire,' said my friend; 'but it is a country one can love.' To a certain extent this is true, in that one can love the country and its inhabitants, yet deplore its politics. When known, Spain is a country one can love with gratitude and joy; it is a country that can exercise an irresistible attraction; and its peculiar fascination, once felt, never fades, but grows ever stronger. Yet it is impossible, when looking back at its political history since the days of the great Hapsburgs, to admire what is only a lamentable history of deplorable government. I am sure there is no country in Europe that has suffered more from bad government than Spain, and the events of recent years, which have perhaps culminated in the Revolution of last April, are a reaction due to a number of enthusiastic Spaniards bent upon restoring the fortunes of their country. Whether they succeed must depend to a great

Blackfriars

extent on their conception of success. They may succeed in obtaining what they desire, but they themselves cannot tell whether their success will be the best possible thing for Spain.

A few ideas on the situation, however rambling and incoherent, may not come amiss. I speak with no intimate knowledge of Spanish affairs; my sole authority, if authority it be, is a long study of Spanish culture in its principal manifestations, and some knowledge of the country's social conditions, gained by travel and many conversations with Spaniards of all classes. Moreover, I write this within four weeks of the proclamation of the Republic; by the time this article is published many new developments may have arisen.

The problem for me does not seem to turn upon the relative advantages of Monarchy and Republic as forms of government studied purely theoretically, but upon what is best for Spain. The fact that Monarchy is an excellent thing in England should not lead one to the conclusion that it should also be so in Spain. On the other hand, the fact that a Republic has suited France, and that Parliamentary government has been such a success in England, should give the supporters of the new Spanish régime no grounds for optimism. Monarchy as now conceived in England has never existed in Spain. Recently it has probably had far less prestige in Spain than in any other kingdom of Europe. Yet nowhere else has the monarchical ideal ever risen so high as in sixteenth century Spain. There the nation, newly risen to greatness and consciousness of its own power, saw the gradual disruption of medieval civilization taking place before the anarchy rife in Europe. Not only did it wish to defend itself, but it wished to save Catholicism for Europe, and the Monarchy was the means whereby it was able to enter upon this conflict. No other sover-

The Spanish Republic

eign has ever influenced the character of his people, expressed their ideals, fought for their position in world affairs, as Philip II did for Spain. Charles V consolidated the unity of Spain which alone enabled it to face Europe, Philip II maintained this unity and gave it a greater spiritual force. Without a Monarchy no such thing as the extraordinary manifestation of Spanish unity and energy in this period could have been possible. The Monarchy did not only raise itself to such a position of unique power; it was raised there and upheld by the wishes of the people, who saw their ideals embodied and safeguarded in the person of the King. This monarchical ideal continued after Philip's death, though the personal worth of the monarch was not upheld by his successors. Esteem for the Monarchy tended to fade, as respect for the person of the monarch began to disappear, and little more than the shadow has since remained. If it has seemed to flourish again it has been only a theory, an abortive attempt to restore an ideal: no adequate reason for it has ever re-appeared.

The *Romancero*, that great treasure house of medieval Spanish history and life, reveals the Monarchy as at the service of the people. 'We are as good as you,' was the reminder always given to the King by *Cortes*. No such thing was ever said to Philip. The people knew they were below him; they respected and loved him, but they never feared him. He was for them a true father, they knew he lived for them alone, that no personal appeal to his justice would ever pass unnoticed. He was for them *El Rey Prudente*, the King who never went wrong. This passed from the person of Philip to the idea of a sovereign. For the Spaniard of the Hapsburg era the phrase *El Rey Nuestro Señor* meant, as Ludwig Pfandl has expressed it, 'Father of the Fatherland, Protector of the Faith and of the Native Soil, Rewarder of Industry, the Avenger of

Blackfriars

Evil, the Bearer of Power, the Ambassador and the Blessed of God.' This amazing conception of an earthly Ruler and Father gave all Spaniards that family unity, that democratic pride in their relations with each other, that oneness of aim which led to such great things in all walks of life, but also in part to one great failure—economic decadence, the remembrance of which has lain heavily on the imaginations of 'enlightened' men, with the result now seen.

The idea of a sovereign as a universal father subsisted throughout the seventeenth century and alone preserved the spark of life in Spanish Monarchism. When eventually the degenerate Hapsburgs died out in the pitiful person of Charles II *el Hechizado*—'the Bewitched'—I consider the monarchical ideal to have perished too. If it existed under the Bourbons it was a patriotic, but artificial manifestation, one that had no longer any moral or political significance, certainly little unifying influence upon the nation as a whole. When the Monarchy was restored in 1874 with Alfonso XII it had to fight against two centuries of lost prestige, Charles III having been the only ruler worthy of the name of King. And it has not been strong enough to win.

The political history of the nineteenth century in Spain makes pitiful reading. The country had been deprived of any form of democratic government for nearly three centuries, and the popular revolt against Joseph Bonaparte and the French invasion brought with it a cry for a Constitution and a Parliament. This was not obtained until Ferdinand VII was compelled to grant it in 1820. Nobody can maintain that the subsequent history of Spanish parliamentarism has been anything approaching a success. Perhaps the greatest evil in its history has been the meddling of the army in politics. Any general who chose to make a *pronunciamiento* made one, and immediately upset

The Spanish Republic

any advance that might have been made in the governing of the country. But another hindrance to good government was the shadow of royal absolutism, seen in the violent repression of all political opposition, which continually hung over the country. Isabel II's reign was a disastrous period for the Monarchy. She was a weak woman and a bad Queen, her court was a scandal, and in politics she was shifty and faithless and continually ignored the Constitution. This caused the rise of Republicanism, and the Monarchists themselves were weakened by the discord in their ranks, for chivalrous loyalty to the throne was divided between Isabel and the Carlist pretender. Isabel's conduct ranged all parties against her, and in the later years of her reign she was only kept on the throne by General Narváez, until after his death the revolution of 1868 drove her out of the country, and there was no general left who was willing to make a *pronunciamiento* in her favour.

Spain could then have been well pardoned for proclaiming a Republic. The question, 'What advantages have we ever had from the Monarchy during these last two hundred years?' must have been on the lips of all. No honest person could ever have pointed to one single advantage or thought of Ferdinand VII and Isabel II with anything but dismay. Yet the Republicans did not sweep the country. The Royalists were in a vast majority, but on no account would they tolerate the return of Isabel. *Cortes* then began the search for a King. Spain was in the anomalous position of a Monarchy without a Monarch. After two years of searching round Europe, *Cortes*, the King-makers, found that Amadeo of Savoy was willing to accept the crown. He was a well-meaning man of excellent character, but his position as a foreigner was impossible, and he was forced to abdicate in 1873. Hastily the monarchical *Cortes* voted for a Republic,

Blackfriars

and the new form of government was at first received without disturbance. It seemed the obvious thing to do, if only because it was a means of salvation not hitherto tried.

Comparisons between this Republic and the one proclaimed in April are interesting. The one was a sudden makeshift decision, the other has been a movement carefully planned for years by idealists who have dreamt of this all their lives. The one appears to have a substantial majority of the inhabitants of the large towns—who alone have any political influence—to support it, the other was voted for by *Cortes Constituyentes* chosen by less than a third of the nation at a period when civil war was rampant, Andalusia in a state of anarchy, and the northern provinces in the hands of the Carlists. Both have been attempts to end periods of unrest, and both have been received with feverish enthusiasm. Movements of regional disintegration set in then as they have now. Catalonia, Valencia, and Andalusia attempted to form separate states, and civil war resulted. *Cortes* were disunited, Republicanism was no organised political party, Ministry after Ministry resigned in their inability to cope with the situation and to quell the Carlist revolt. Finally, the *pronunciamiento* of 1874 restored the Monarchy in the person of Alfonso XII, Isabel's son. The Republic had not lived for two years, and in that brief period had already seen five Presidents. The sincere Republicans had been earnest and able men, but they were the first to recognise the impossibility of their task. They had received no definite support, and the Alfonsists easily won public opinion, though public opinion is always a minority in Spain. A moderate Constitutional Monarchy was formed, and incompetent Parliamentary government set in as before. Before his death in 1885 Alfonso seemed to have lost already much of his popularity, and though

The Spanish Republic

an excellent man in many respects, he was never strong enough to entrench his position.

That of his successor has never been entirely secure, and his difficulties have been aggravated by the rise of Socialism and Republicanism, both now formidable organisations, as well as by the continued failure of Parliament to produce a satisfactory government. Corruption came to such a head that the last military *pronunciamiento* was proclaimed in 1923, and a period of seven years' dictatorship followed. To any unprejudiced observer the economic benefits of this seem to have been undeniable, but it was never able to win much popular support, and repressive measures only fanned the flames of opposition. A young generation arose that looked upon a dictatorship as a disgraceful humiliation. The raising of the censorship immediately brought a wave of Republican outbursts. All might have been well if the return to a reformed constitutionalism had been achieved. But the dictatorship had continued far too long. Primo de Rivera, however well-meaning, was unable to win enough support to effect a return to constitutional government. A new Constitution was needed, but nobody could devise one. He held power too long because he was unable to offer anything else in exchange. The two ministries that succeeded him were obviously never secure. Politically nothing whatever had been gained during the last eight years. Revolt was evident everywhere, and it was certain that the new *Cortes*, when convoked, would spring surprises. This was, however, anticipated, and the municipal elections soon revealed the impossible position of the last ministry. The long-awaited *Cortes* are now to be called by a Republic. The Monarchy has been made the scapegoat for the despotism of the past eight years. The King, it is alleged, has violated the Constitution he was pledged to support. He is said to represent the

Blackfriars

spirit of repression which the Republicans, Socialists, and hot-headed youths contend represents a distrust of democratic liberty. It really seems as if the opposition to the Monarchy is, at present, overwhelming among the influential section of the population, and that if the King had not peacefully retired civil war would have resulted.

The oldest Monarchy in Europe is, therefore, once more without a throne. Regrettable as this is from the historical point of view, it must be conceded that that is purely sentiment. If Spain is really to be more successful and prosperous without a Monarchy, then why have a Monarchy? For an Englishman this may be hard to understand. In England the Monarchy is an institution, and has all the value that an age-long institution can offer: a feeling of stability, unity and order. In Spain this is not the case. I personally doubt if social reverence for the Monarchy exists to any great extent. The nation is essentially democratic. A sovereign who is no more than a figure-head of the ship of state could not exist in Spain; if there is to be a sovereign, he must be one in more than name, and he must justify his existence. The problem, therefore, takes on a significance which is unknown in a country such as England. Parliament would function the same, King or no King. In Spain *Cortes* without a King will be very different to *Cortes* with a King. The question can never be decided theoretically; both sides must be given an equal chance. One side is now to have it. But it can with perfect truth be said that the other side never had such a chance. Alfonso XIII never had a good Parliament to work with. The failure of Spanish democracy cannot be attributed to him, and few Republicans would go so far as to do so. It is only the shadow of the dictatorship that blinds their vision. I maintain that the Monarchy has not had a fair chance to rehabilitate its lost prestige. The prob-

The Spanish Republic

iem lies deeper. It lies with the system of democratic government. Only when that is satisfactorily settled in a way that suits the Spanish people and is not a servile imitation of foreign methods, can the other question of Monarchy or Republic be logically settled too. And the difficulties of this latter problem are insignificant compared to those that await the solution of the former.

There are further reasons which can account for the revolutionary movements of the last few decades. I think one of the most potent of these lies in what is commonly called an 'inferiority complex.' The rest of the world has always looked upon Modern Spain as a backward country. Whether this be just or not, it is a fact that has hurt the 'Intellectuals.' The Republican movement did not spring from the people—who still remain politically apathetic on the whole; it came from the 'cultured' classes, from University professors, students, and literary men. They, and others, have looked with dismay upon the 'backwardness' of their country. They are all admirers of other nations, of England, France and Germany, and they were not content that Spain should remain cut off from Europe; they desired for it 'a place in the sun.' If Spain were modernized, Europeanized, industrialized, it could, they considered, become a great power. They attributed the state of their country to political backwardness, religious intolerance and general lack of modern 'civilization.' They clamoured for a modern democracy, and were, therefore, Republicans and Socialists; they opposed the power of the Church and her hold on the people, and were, therefore, anti-clericals and, for the most part, atheists; they desired more 'civilization' and, therefore, industry.

Most of these ideals are admirable enough, but I am sure that they are misguided. They presume a state of liberty and democracy which surely does not

Blackfriars

exist. A Spanish professor, whose friendship I value highly, was astonished when I spoke disparagingly of the British Parliament, and pointed out the present incompetence of our so-called democracy. For him they meant perfection of government. Will a Spaniard now have greater liberty because he can put a cross next to a candidate's name on a slip of paper? Will he now have a greater voice in the governing of his country? Or will not the country be governed by a few professional politicians as it always has been, and as all countries are?

Is Spain uncivilized because it manufactures no motor cars, because the express trains do not average fifty-five miles an hour nor run for two hundred miles without stopping? Is it uncivilized because factories do not pour out useless articles of luxury; because instead of wasting their time making such articles the vast majority of the inhabitants sow and gather their crops, tend their vines, pick their fruit, and do not care twopence for a vote? Are they backward and fanatical because they do not read modern novels, nor go to the cinema, but to church instead? No, Spain is a far more civilized country than most of the so-called great powers, for in it the family still reigns supreme, a child is a blessing and not a curse, the domestic virtues flourish, and religion lives in the hearts of the people; because agriculture is the means of livelihood, large towns are rare, life is hard and austere, with luxury almost unknown, and yet happiness and a simple care-free spirit are the hall-marks of the nation. Progress does not mean 'moving with the times'; it does not require a nation to have a say in world politics, nor a seat on the Council of the League of Nations, nor to be able to win wars. Progress means continuation in a standard of sane living. Spain has not moved with the times, and thank God for that!

The Spanish Republic

Are, then, these enlightened intellectuals who have now seized power to change all this? The answer is : Let them try, for they will never do it. They may turn Bilbao into a second Liverpool—it is nearly that already—but they will never turn Spain into a second England. They will never uproot the standard of sane living from the hearts of the peasantry, and it must be remembered that the greater part of the population are peasants. I doubt if the inhabitants of the large towns number a quarter of the total population. Nevertheless, it was their votes that overturned the Monarchy. They alone have any interest in politics. Three-quarters of the country do not care one jot for politics, nor for Monarchy, nor for Republic. They will keep any reasonable law provided they have their church and priest, their house, fields, and orchard. They will support the present Government as they have supported all preceding ones—by taking no notice of it. But should it seek to change their lives in any way, they will be up in arms at once.

Not as much as a quarter of the population (this is a conjecture which I have no means of proving) asked for a Republic, and they got it. They may have been in the right. If they alone care about a government, they alone should form one. If a Republic will make them any happier, they certainly ought to have it : it will make no difference to the rest of the nation. If in this way their inferiority complex disappears, well and good : the other three-quarters never had such a thing. The only real danger for Spain that I see in this new Republic is a possibility of their meddling with the peasantry. In a recent number of *El Sol* I read an article by a well-known journalist, in which he asked that the villagers be 'politically educated' and brought into line with 'modern thought.' Nevertheless, I am confident that any attempt at such an 'education' will ultimately fail.

Blackfriars

The Republic, therefore, has been raised by a minority. It will be kept there or overturned by the same minority. What, then, are its chances? This article was already finished when the news of the outbreak of anarchy in Madrid and elsewhere, and the burning of churches and convents reached this country. This is indeed upsetting, for I had expected no such thing. I had anticipated a continued peaceful attitude on the part of the Government's supporters. It is impossible to say whether this outbreak of lawlessness is likely to have serious consequences or not. The mobs responsible for it have many of the Spanish virtues, but also most of the vices; they are quickly roused to enthusiasm, easily led to violence, and quite unstable in their opinions. They may be quickly subdued, or they may just as quickly go from bad to worse. It will be lamentable if such violence is going to become general. It will make the coming elections not only a farce but a scandal. Perhaps only extreme optimists like myself ever hoped that personal animosity and violence would ever disappear from Spanish politics. Any such attack on religion can only bring a strong monarchical reaction by uniting all Catholics, and even by driving into their ranks the more moderate of the anti-clericals. I have met the extreme type of Spanish anti-clerical, a University lecturer, who would have all churches burnt and all priests and nuns expelled or shot. I have also met the more moderate type, also in the person of a University lecturer, who deplores clerical influence in so far as he maintains that it leads to lack of education among the poorer classes, but who would himself defend the Church in Spain if any sort of persecution ever broke out. I think he really expressed the view of the Republican leaders, no persecution in any form can ever be part of their policy. The Church in Spain is far too strong, and persecution can only serve to

The Spanish Republic

make it still stronger, even if it does no more than revive the faith of indifferent Catholics, the number of whom is by no means small. If these riots continue, no matter whether the Government supports them or not, there will be no Republic by the end of the year, but there may be any amount of bloodshed before the Republic ceases to exist.

Should these riots merely be a flash in the pan, should peace again reign and the elections pass off in reasonable tranquillity, I think it not unlikely that the Republicans will have a workable majority in *Cortes*. If they then continue in the moderation which has characterised their rule so far, they may well bring to political Spain the settled government it has so long desired. If they prove as incompetent as their predecessors, then the Monarchy will almost assuredly return, and it will be acclaimed with enthusiasm by the same people who saw it go. One can hope they may succeed, though fearing all the time that Spanish politics will always be as chaotic and violent as they have been in the last century. The Republic may live for many years; it may be non-existent by July. It will not matter very much. The Spain that all lovers of the nation know, and it is not the Spain that journalists, film-producers, or visitors to Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville know, will continue to be the same delightful country it was and is. If one must take politics, and even Spanish politics, seriously, then I think we should hope that its troubles may soon cease, and that this Republic may be the harbinger of better days to come. Nobody will be more sincere in that wish than Alfonso XIII himself, despite the harsh and unmerited treatment he has received at the hands of a minority of his people. Nobody will forgive them so willingly as he. And if our admiration counts for anything, surely he has it.

ALEXANDER PARKER.