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Dmas 1936.

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THE SPANISH TRAGEDY
1930-1936



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SPAIN, A COMPANION TO SPANISH STUDIES
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SPAIN, A COMPANION TO SPANISH TRAVEL
SPANISH MYSTICISM

STUDIES OF THE SPANISH MYSTICS

RIVAS AND ROMANTICISM IN SPAIN

RIVAS, A CRITICAL STUDY

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Translations

THE WORKS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

THE BOOK OF THE LOVER AND THE
BELOVED

THE ROMANTICS OF SPAIN
BLANQUERNA

THE SPANISH TRAGEDY

1930-1936

Dictatorship, Republic, Chaos

by

E. ALLISON PEERS

PROFESSOR OF SPANISH IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF LIVERPOOL

SECOND EDITION



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TO
J. L. G.

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PREFACE

How can we explain all that is happening in Spain to-day?

Since the text of this book was completed, the two opposing forces in the Civil War have become locked in a still more desperate struggle, which is being pursued to the death in an atmosphere of dense political confusion and with a ruthlessness and ferocity which we had thought never to read of again, save in remote history and sensational fiction. It is useless to pronounce upon these events, as many are doing, by applying to them facile formulae transferred from the language of their own country and by censuring Spaniards for failing to act as they imagine they themselves would act in similar circumstances. Spain is not Britain, nor France, nor America, but herself—unique in many ways that in times of peace may well arouse our envy, but unique also in that the gods, while giving her so many gifts, denied her not only that of a good government, but others which just now she could have turned to excellent advantage. Let us cease taking sides in the conflict and try to understand.

Both geography and history protest against an attempt to judge Spain as though she were some other nation. Not only with a 'moat defensive', but with a strong mountain-wall she has been protected from her neighbours—and she has developed most of the characteristics of peninsularity. Spain is all but the most mountainous country in Europe, and shows incredible extremes of climate, together with variety, as well as abundance, of natural wealth, and violent regional dissimilarities in the temperament of her people. Though sparsely populated, in the main by agriculturists, she has two of her twenty-two millions crowded into her two greatest cities. The

Spaniards, who in the past have been so strangely romanticized abroad, are not one people but many: they share between them, not one mother-tongue, but four; and, quite apart from regional differences, almost any individual Spaniard will display so many apparently inconsistent traits of character that it will be the work of years to learn to know him. All these facts play their part in the present national tragedy.

The part played in it by history no doubt began when successive powers coveted and conquered the delectable Peninsula—Iberians, Celts, Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Goths and Moors—the last remaining in the south-east for close upon eight centuries. Another problem was laid up for succeeding ages to solve when in the fifteenth century Castile and Aragon-Catalonia were united by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabel, and still another when excessive centralization light-heartedly deprived Catalonians and Basques of their age-old privileges. The prize of the New World, which by a coincidence fell into the lap of Spain in the same year in which she freed herself from the Moors, was no unmixed blessing. Steadily bled, by the necessities of conquest and colonization, of her finest youth, ill-governed by weak or ambitious kings, impoverished by foreign wars and a benighted economic policy, condemned in the eighteenth century to ape the ways of France and reacting in the nineteenth by sinking back into her strange, reserved isolation, she found herself at the end of the War of 1898, shorn of her last colonies, far from the path of contemporary progress, despised by nations who centuries before had recognized her as a great Power.

It was then that the country, which for some time had been stirring uneasily, awoke to the greatness of her responsibilities and the extent of her decadence, and the spirit of reform, which had been alive throughout the nineteenth century, began quickly to make itself felt. This book is essentially a narrative of the most recent

events in Spain, and to deal in the least adequately with her fundamental problems would be to write a second volume—quite unnecessarily, since other writers have treated them capably and at length. But briefly, before the reign of Alfonso XIII had begun, a divine discontent had effected vast improvements in social life, while at the same time it had started to make the cleavage between conservative and progressive Spaniards which in the last five years has so alarmingly widened. The rapid rise of Socialism from its modest beginnings in 1888, the development of Syndicalism, Communism and Anarchism (the latter now uniquely strong in Spain), the growing importunity of a few would-be autonomous regions, the clamourings of agricultural workers hungry for land, the increasing desire for religious tolerance, the splendid achievements and ideals of a few great educationists—all these things excited the opposition of those who preferred the former ways, and were content, when others decried the vices of the old order, to invoke and exaggerate its virtues. Once the progressives began to make themselves felt, the political pendulum, which for some time had been jogging to and fro harmlessly enough, quickly showed signs of becoming an alarming phenomenon. Could reform but have come gradually, we might have been spared the appalling catastrophe of to-day. But it had been delayed for so long that men demanded it quickly and there were always those who demanded more than the rest. So when in 1923 Primo de Rivera, in his impatience with the corruption and ineffectiveness of political and bureaucratic rule, agitated the pendulum more violently than had any before him, he was unconsciously preparing for the future not only recriminations but reprisals. Since then they have never ceased. The political prisoner of to-day is the Prime Minister of to-morrow. The hammer of the rebels quickly becomes the rebel leader. Years which are a mockery of peace end in open war. . . .

THE SPANISH TRAGEDY

This book, though it appears in the midst of that war, was all but completed before the outbreak of hostilities.

When, about a year ago, it became increasingly clear that the Second Republic, founded with such high hopes by men of such high ideals, was, in the form that it then bore, doomed to disaster, I set to work to describe its career in a short and unpretentious chronicle. Chance has enabled me at the same time, without either undue hurry or delay, to write its epitaph. The last few weeks have been intensely painful for all who believe in Spain's future and can admire the men who, though sometimes blindly, have tried, nobly and single-heartedly, to lead her. Though elements of comedy—even of the broadest comedy—enliven some of the scenes of this drama, it is essentially, and in the Shakespearian sense, a tragedy, in which, as one looks back upon its course, all else seems weak beside the catastrophe.

For now nearly twenty years I have spent over one-quarter of my time in the Peninsula, and, though the personal pronoun intrudes but little in the narrative, much that is described in it has been not merely read but seen. A chronicle of events in Spain which I have written weekly since 1929 has been freely utilized, but my main sources, for book as for chronicle, have been the Spanish daily Press, together with the valuable articles of the correspondents of *The Times*, for which British students of Spanish affairs cannot be too grateful.

While complete impartiality is always difficult of achievement, I have tried to describe the events of these years with all possible objectivity; and party politicians, on whichever side, will look in vain for their pet exaggerations. I have neither declared, for example, with one recent writer, that 'the rigour with which war is waged against Roman Catholics surpasses anything imaginable', nor with another, more recent still, that 'the repression of the Fascist Spanish Government

PREFACE

against the workers of Asturias is so frightful that it surpasses anything you may have heard up till now about any other country in the world'.

For the sake of readableness, I have used political terms familiar to English readers rather than strange-sounding ones, and have refrained from sprinkling the pages with such strings of letters as F.A.I., U.H.P., J.O.N.S., P.O.U.M., which are commonplaces of the Spanish Press. So far as I know, no substantial part of anything I have previously written is included in these pages, but short passages have occasionally been incorporated from numerous articles contributed to the *Nineteenth Century and After*, the *Contemporary Review*, the *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, the *Commonweal*, the *Observer*, the *Liverpool Daily Post*, the *Church Times*, the *Nation*, and a few other periodicals, to whose editors I have often had cause to be grateful for much consideration.

E.A.P.

LIVERPOOL

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CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF THE REPUBLIC

I

ON January 28, 1930, Don Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja, Marqués de Estella and Dictator of Spain, laid down the office to which, six years and four months earlier, he had appointed himself, and retired to Paris, where, after barely seven weeks, he died.

Primo de Rivera's experiment in dictatorship had started well, for it had represented a new and attractive-looking attempt to do away with Spain's unchanging phenomenon of continually changing governments, and to solve the problem of what to do with such problems as inefficient administration, which had previously refused to be solved. It ended badly—and a number of reasons are made to account for its bad end, but the real reasons were inherent in the character of the Dictator and of the Spanish people.

The Dictator was a benevolent Andalusian, with all the Andalusian's outstanding faults and virtues. He loved ostentation and parade; he talked too much, chiefly through the medium of fantastic official *communiqués*; he exaggerated freely; his generous promises were often in excess of what he was able to perform; and, when incensed, he acted like an imprudent and impulsive father, imposing the heaviest punishments, only to modify or remit them altogether as soon as his wrath had subsided. He liked to think that his rule was a mild and paternal one—not a '*dictadura*', to reproduce the play on words current at the time in Spain, but a '*dictablanda*'.(1)

Besides being an Andalusian, he was a soldier—and this at once by descent, by profession, and by temperament. Army officers, in effect, brought him into power,

and army officers, in literal truth, brought about his fall. He trusted and believed in the officer class as he never trusted or believed in the *bourgeois* class, still less in the intellectuals. He had no conception of organizing a country otherwise than as a species of army. Unmindful of such phenomena as the rapid growth of Socialism and the increasing importunity of the regionalists, he attempted to drill the nation as though it were a single unit—much as he had once drilled his men. And so, despite his many excellent qualities—profound sincerity, intense patriotism, unfailing courtesy, steady perseverance, amazing industry, indomitable courage—he brought to nothing the pretentious edifice which he had reared with so much buoyant confidence, and ultimately caused the fall of the monarchical *régime*, to which he could probably have conceived no alternative but chaos.

In part, too, the termination of the Dictatorship was due to the character of the Spanish people. Up to a certain point the best in them can be brought out by effective leadership, for (to speak generally) they co-operate and organize but poorly, yet have a great love for the symbol, a rare idealism and a fine sense of loyalty. But the limits beyond which they refuse to follow blindly have in the last few decades become much narrower. Had Primo de Rivera lived in the seventeenth century he would no doubt have marshalled the nation with far greater success. Had Alfonso XIII been called to rule the people who groaned under his great-grandfather, Ferdinand VII, he would no doubt have gone down to his grave at a ripe old age beloved (or at least tolerated) by all. But Spain had changed tremendously in the century (1823–1923) between Ferdinand's victory over the Liberals and Primo de Rivera's victory over constitutionalism. It was the custom in Spain, during the Dictatorship, for Liberals to repeat appreciatively the blunt description of Alfonso XIII attributed to various notabilities—*Fernando VII y pico*: 'Ferdinand VII plus

a bit more'. The description should have been accompanied by another of Spain itself: 'Ferdinand VII's Spain minus a great deal'. The Spaniards, taken all round, are not so democratically inclined as most other nations of Western Europe, nor are they as progressive a people as some of their intellectuals would like them, and us, to believe. If we reject, as we should, the 'Black Legend' which makes them a nation of ignorant, inquisitorial fanatics and picturesque brigands, we must not immediately give credence to a 'White Legend' which turns them into the most enlightened nation under the sun and invests them with an aureole of strictly undenominational sanctity. But we need not fall into that error in order to appreciate the fact that the Spaniards are a great deal more democratic and progressive than their immediate ancestors could have foreseen that they would be, or than Primo de Rivera and his royal master could have suspected. As a result, though at first resigning themselves to the Dictatorship, and even approving it, they gradually reacted against it with such determination that, had it not collapsed of its own weight when it did, only a few months more could have stood between it and a popular revolution.

The outstanding features of the rule of Primo de Rivera can be summarized quite briefly. It triumphed in a day—September 13, 1923—as a military movement, acquiesced in by the King, and probably, at that time, welcomed by the majority of the people.⁽²⁾ Had it at once sought the approval of the Cortes, there is little doubt that it could have been constitutionally established, for, with the country weary to death of political instability and social unrest, the professional politicians were thoroughly discredited. But the Dictator believed that he could sweep away formalities like the Constitution with impunity; and besides, he announced, and continually repeated, that he had come to rule only for a period of ninety days, and aimed only at preparing the country for democratic government purged of impurities