

LIFE IN SPAIN TODAY

BY HANS HABE

A GREAT Spanish statesman and writer once said: "Spain without music would be like Athens without owls, Munich without beer or Paris without women." Today, Spain is a country without music. You can travel for days through Spanish cities and villages, you can frequent the restaurants and cafés of Madrid, Barcelona, Saragossa or Seville and never hear any music or songs. Spain has sunk into weariness and despair.

In present-day Europe, weariness and dejection are not unusual. But in Spain everything takes on greater clarity and sharpness. Formerly, the Spaniards used to laugh, love and play in the streets. Today they starve in the streets — just as loudly and conspicuously. There is a popular anecdote in Spain about a fisherman who complains that since Franco has come to power it is impossible to catch any fish. "No wonder," a second fisherman replies, "not even a fish dares to open its mouth." This anecdote may be witty, but it does not quite do justice to the facts. It is true that

newspapers, radios, public speakers are as regimented in Spain as in any other dictatorship; but the man in the street talks openly of his sufferings.

Back in the days when Europe was a tourist's paradise, booths at most frontier stations displayed the typical products of the country to be entered. Recently, when I reached Figueras on the Spanish border, my car was at once surrounded by a crowd of soldiers, frontier guards and policemen in their motley Napoleonic uniforms, *tricornes* and cartridge belts. Civilians — old men, women and children in bright-colored rags — thronged around me begging for food. In this throng the field-gray caps of two German Gestapo officers stood out for their relative immobility. Later I realized that this display was a preview of the principal "products" of Franco's Spain — policemen, Gestapo agents and beggars.

How to get bread and tobacco is the main subject of conversation in the Spanish towns and villages.

The bread, for three ounces of which people with bread cards stand in long queues, is almost inedible; it contains only 30 per cent of flour. Olive oil, sugar and meat are also rationed, on a scale which will seem incredible to Americans. Each person is allowed only three lumps of sugar and one ounce of meat a week. Fish, ham and potatoes are not rationed, but often there are no potatoes or fish on the market for weeks. Valencia, Cartagena and Malaga have been without eggs, milk or butter for the last four months. When I asked a peasant woman between Molina and Guadalajara why she had no eggs, she answered, "Where do you expect eggs to come from when the soldiers have eaten our chickens?" A waiter in Merida from whom I ordered a "Spanish omelet" — made of egg and potatoes — explained, "Today a *tortilla Española* is an omelet without eggs and without potatoes." In certain regions — south of Toledo, for example — one is struck by the complete absence of dogs and cats; they have been eaten by the hungry population. The government finally had to destroy more than 30,000 dogs because of epidemics that resulted from eating dog meat.

According to Colonel Crockett's latest Red Cross report, people

have been eating grass in some sections, particularly in the Almeria and Albacete districts. In Andalusia the famine is no less devastating, and Franco himself admits that the 250,000 fishermen in Galicia are facing starvation.

In no other country is famine so conspicuous. A few weeks ago an anti-British poster was nailed on the walls of Madrid, Valencia, Barcelona and Seville. It represented England and the United States as responsible for Spanish misery. *Franco's dictatorship is the only one to admit and advertise its hunger.*

Since tobacco is simply non-existent, no one is surprised to find the tobacco shops selling perfumes, umbrellas or picture frames. The transformation of shops is a general phenomenon. A recent decree forbids "the use of foreign words on store signs." Thus the notice, "Salon de Thé," formerly seen at almost every street corner, has disappeared. This decree is directed less against "foreign words" than against the memory of tea. Since last July the uniformed members of the government party, the Falange, have been forbidden to show themselves in cafes, restaurants or bars. Spain, a nation without bread, is also a nation without circuses.

The country is deficient in almost everything: iron, copper,

light metals, silks, woollens and other clothing. Except for government officials, and a handful of foreigners who cross Spain with their cars, there is no gasoline at all. Before crossing the border one must purchase gasoline cards, paying for them, at the rate of \$1.60 a gallon, in foreign currency. The Spanish have a profound contempt for their own pesetas. On an 1100-mile drive, passing through Barcelona, Madrid, Saragossa and Badajoz, I met only eleven cars, except for a few in the cities. Farther south, near Valencia, I counted an average of one car to every seventy miles. Since they cannot be used, automobiles are incredibly cheap in Spain. An eight-cylinder 1939 American model can be had for from \$10 to \$20.

Gasoline shortage and the breakdown of other transportation have deepened disastrously the effects of food deficits. Before the Civil War, Spain had 17,000 kilometers of track, 2574 locomotives, 70,000 railway cars and 325,000 public conveyances of all kinds. Today there remain only 5000 kilometers of track, 800 locomotives, 18,000 cars and 99,000 public conveyances. Freight rates have skyrocketed, and unfortunately the omnipresent Spanish mule can cover only short distances. Madrid and Barcelona,

in the heart of fertile country, are relatively better supplied than other Spanish cities. But last fall, none the less, grapes were obtainable in Madrid only illegally and at incredibly high prices, while thousands of tons of grapes hung unpicked on the vines along the roads.

Spanish peasants, when questioned about the agricultural crisis, recognize the collapse of transportation as one of the four principal causes. But the first reason — and this is the first answer to every question one asks in Spain — is that the nation has not yet recovered from the devastation of the war. During the war, moreover, when agriculture was utterly neglected, vast armies of insects invaded the country. A revolutionary pamphlet confiscated at Lerida proclaims: "The Spanish fields are governed by insects, the Spanish towns by policemen." Though insects are less conspicuous than policemen in Spain, the farmers are powerless against them.

What is worse, the strict regulation of food prices has made the peasants unwilling to work. In addition, the "popular dictatorship" of Franco, established on feudal-aristocratic lines, took away 12,000,000 acres from the small peasants and restored them to the land-

lords from whom they were expropriated after Alfonso's abdication.

A mass migration into the cities after the Civil War resulted in an appalling housing shortage, because thousands of houses had been destroyed by bombing.

No less conspicuous is the clothing shortage. In smaller towns and villages one is struck by the insignificant number of people in the streets. The reason is the lack of shoes. A law forbids any Spaniard to own more than two pairs of shoes; the vast majority have one pair at most. About a year ago, an order was issued forbidding anyone to appear in the street without shoes. Women wearing men's shoes and even men wearing women's shoes are a common sight; many families possess only one pair for both husband and wife. Practically no one owns more than one suit of clothes. In Madrid, a ready-made suit of German *ersatz* material costs from 1200 to 1800 pesetas, or \$150. No Spaniard can pay such a price. Even the soldiers wear old, shoddy uniforms, and the various militias, Falangist groups, Labor Battalions, and young people's organizations are distinguished only by ragged light-brown shirts. For the last four months, the newly-recruited soldiers have been given arm bands instead of uniforms.

II

Spain is not only the land of beggars. It is also the land of policemen. Last October, Heinrich Himmler, German Gestapo chief, came to Madrid to pave the way for a possible visit by the Führer and to organize the control of refugees traveling through Spain. On his return he is said to have declared, "It is very difficult to 'organize' the Spanish police. Every one of my Gestapo agents is watched by three Spanish secret police officials." "Five policemen," says a joke now circulating in Madrid, "are pursuing four suspect secret policemen who are on the trail of three conspirators plotting to kill two civil guards because they arrested a conspirator plotting against the original five." There seem to be only three kinds of people in Spain — civilians, soldiers, and those who watch the civilians and soldiers.

General Franco had promised the people a grandiose reconstruction program, to cost \$516,000,000. Roads were to be constructed, houses built, agriculture thoroughly reorganized. Nothing has been done. For this, of course, Franco is not solely responsible. Germany and Italy intervened in the war less for ideological reasons than with a view to colonizing the

backward country economically. To be sure, this would have made Spain permanently dependent on foreigners; but at least the reconstruction program would have been carried out. But Germany and Italy have had more urgent business. The reconstruction program remains on paper. The ruined cities remain in ruins. Well aware of this, the Spaniards grumble constantly against their government.

Madrid's University City district, which suffered most, is in the same ruin as two years ago. Except in the heart of the capital, nothing has been rebuilt. Today there is an average of three Spaniards to every room. This means that in certain sections of the larger cities one room is often occupied by ten or twelve persons. In Barcelona, less affected than Madrid, gardens have been planted in entire quarters of the city. These extensive gardens will no doubt embellish the city; but they are no substitute for the wrecked buildings. In Guadalajara and many other cities whole blocks of dwellings have been replaced by dismantled railway coaches; more than 600,000 Spaniards live in these makeshift shelters.

Tuberculosis, which has greatly decreased in other European countries, is again on the rise in Spain. In Andalusia, where the population

of an entire town is often crowded into a few houses, 30,000 children from three to fourteen years old died of T.B. in August alone. Guards are posted in all wrecked city quarters and access is difficult for visitors. Lerida, with its 40,000 inhabitants, is completely cut off. A narrow road goes around the town; foreigners are forbidden to enter. Official Spain, unlike the ancient warrior who showed his scars, tries to conceal its wounds. To see them one must penetrate a police cordon.

All this explains why Franco has so completely lost his original popularity. Though Serrano Suñer, his brother-in-law, is held responsible for all the recent developments, the entire dictatorship has been compromised. It must not be forgotten that Franco publicizes himself less than any other dictator. At Cook's in Barcelona, three or four large pictures of various Führers adorn the walls. Beside Franco's one invariably finds the gray-haired but youthful-looking head of Suñer and the ascetic head of Gamero del Castillo, radical Falange leader.

No Spanish hotel — except in Barcelona, where the local governor inclines toward more democratic principles — is allowed to receive a guest without police approval. The name, nationality, profession and birthplace of each

guest are transmitted to the police before he can move into his room. If permission is granted, he must leave the hotel before six o'clock the next morning. To stay longer, another authorization is necessary.

Police rule is no less strict in restaurants and cafés. Two restaurant owners who complained of the difficulties attending their business were fined 5000 pesetas each, and a Polish traveler who expressed dissatisfaction with his food at Saragossa is still in prison. (Spanish prisons do not feed their inmates, who must pay for what they eat. On the prison menu one egg costs 25 cents.) In some provinces, whose governors are little dictators making their own laws, the sale of gasoline without cards is punished by death. Telephone conversations are guarded so strictly that the telephone owner who has not come into contact with the police is a rarity. Out of 350,000 telephones in pre-war Spain — they were managed by the American International Telephone and Telegraph Company — only 190,000 are in use.

In other ways, the police constantly interfere in the citizens' private lives. According to the decree of July 30, 1940, every man between eighteen and fifty must work fifteen days a year for the state. Penalties for evading this law

are a fine of from 100 to 2000 pesetas or one to three months' imprisonment. But as the "saboteurs" have no money for fines, more than 12,000 Spaniards are now in jail for refusal to work for the state. Under the decree of August 3, 1940 — an edict unique in the annals of jurisprudence — every Spaniard must submit his monthly budget to the nearest police commissioner. Every month he fills out a questionnaire stating his consumption of meat, bread, vegetables and other food articles, listing all articles of clothing purchased, detailing his expenses for rent and entertainment. This information must be "honest and scrupulously exact." Persons who have been sentenced as "enemies of the people" are given over to "public opprobrium." Their names are placed on lists posted in all public establishments, and especially in restaurants and cafés.

One would scarcely think these café pillories justified by their results, however, for today no less than *one million* Spanish men, women and children are languishing in medieval prisons for "political crimes." In Saragossa I met a family of seven, five of whom were in jail. The only "survivors" were an eighty-year-old man and his seventy-six-year-old wife. One son had been arrested for refusal to

work without pay, the second for wearing an RAF badge. A grandson had failed to deliver the eggs from the family farm, a second grandson had been denounced as belonging to an anarchist organization. The last prisoner was the nineteen-year-old granddaughter, who in a letter to her fiancé in Portugal complained of the Spanish mail service.

But despite such draconic police measures, one day in a Barcelona café a note was suddenly thrust into my hand. Whoever did it had vanished before I could look around. The note read:

Spain has 26,000,000 inhabitants.
 Of these, about 13,000,000 are male.
 Of these, about 1,000,000 are in prison.
 About 1,000,000 are policemen.
 About 1,000,000 are bureaucrats.
 About 1,000,000 are in military formations.
 The rest — unemployed and beggars — number 9,000,000.
 But Spain employs:
 100,000 German agents and technicians
 40,000 Italian agents
 25,000 German laborers
 44,000 Italian laborers.

My eyes rose from these statistics to the lists of political outcasts that had replaced the menus on the café walls. Pillories in coffeeshop cafés — that, too, is the Spain of today. No wonder the Spaniards have stopped singing.

III

German penetration of Spain began long before the military penetration. Today, in Barcelona's beautiful Palm Street, German "tourists" with big swastikas in their buttonholes are seen at every step. They greet Spanish soldiers with the Hitler salute. Germans, and Italians wearing fascist insignia, monopolize the dining-rooms of the Ritz Hotels in Barcelona and Madrid. There are no food restrictions for these distinguished visitors; they are served pre-war meals with the exception of coffee and tea, which have completely vanished. Everywhere the mark and the lira must be accepted at official rates. Eighty thousand German engineers and technicians are employed in Spanish factories and 20,000 Gestapo agents are fed by the state. And at least 25,000 German workers are eating the bread of Spanish workers.

In the bars and night clubs, the German language is almost as current as in occupied Paris. The Germans can pay prices impossible for the Spaniards: \$8 to \$10 for a bottle of champagne, \$2 for a glass of cognac. The musicians have been forced to learn German tunes. Along with *Chiquita* and the Spanish national anthem, you can hear

a dispirited *Lorelei* and the *Horst Wessel* song. When rich Spaniards want entertainment, they go to Portugal; even the latest "Miss Madrid" was elected in the Olympia Club of Lisbon. Every day, German Lufthansa planes bring wealthy visitors from Berlin, Stuttgart and Munich. The same planes also serve the Barcelona-Teruan-Madrid-Seville and the Burgos-Saragossa lines. At the border, every passport is inspected by both Spanish and Gestapo agents.

The Spaniards look on with bitterness in their hearts. The newspaper propaganda, in Suñer's radical *A.B.C.* and the Falangist *Arriba*, fools no one; the circulation of these papers is falling off from day to day. In contrast, when Franco wanted to pardon 140,000 of the 330,000 Spanish refugees still in France, and the question of where they were to be sheltered arose, 800,000 Spanish families offered to receive them despite their own misery. Recently several hundred thousand RAF insignia were brought into Spain from Portugal, where they enjoy a great popularity. As a result, a whole quarter of Seville had to be arrested one morning because all its inhabitants appeared in the streets wearing the bright little badges. On another occasion the picture of the popular

British Ambassador to Spain, Sir Samuel Hoare, appeared in stationery stores in every Spanish town.

And in this country ruled by the police, even the policemen themselves are having a hard time of it. For some time their income has not been over \$50 a month. Compared to the average Spanish income of \$25 a month, this is large; but it is materially very little. The discontent among the police is leading to a united front between the guards and the guarded.

A successful uprising is, of course, unthinkable without a united front of all opposition forces. So far there is none. But on at least one occasion, buttons bearing the single word *Mañana* appeared simultaneously in almost every Spanish city. *Mañana* means "tomorrow." As a slogan, it naturally implies a whole program.

Most noteworthy of all, perhaps, is the sudden reappearance of old and forbidden Republican songs, which led on July 31, 1940, to a general police raid on all music stores in Spain. It is said of the Austrians that the only thing they can take seriously is a joke. This is even truer of the Spaniards with regard to music. Spain is not yet in a state of rebellion, but a thousand little signs show that it is smouldering beneath the ashes.

TO MARY, DAUGHTER OF ABRAM

*M*ARY, daughter of Abram and Maria Sheldon,
departed this life in April, 1838,

you have a lovely place here, small but lovely,
the highest knoll of all the high hill farm.
Down there below you in the wide wild meadow
the big square house has long been empty, Mary.
Woodchucks live with you now generation after generation.
They have a dozen doorways to your low dwelling.
Maria is here with you and your father, Abram, too.
His stone has fallen flat and the soil of his farm
has closed its lips around the alien stone.
The stone they gave you is white, marble I think.
It leans at a tippy angle but the letters are clear.
Mary, aged sixteen years, three months, twelve days.
Sweet sixteen, I wonder if you had ever been kissed.
I'll bet you had. And let me tell you
that's about all there is to living. So you didn't do so badly.
The stone around here is blue. It weathers to gray
like these three tablets near you lettered only with lichens.
I think they must have been babies, unchristened brothers and sisters.
People died young in your day, Mary Sheldon.
Well, only the old know what it is to be old.
Living is labor in this high and stubborn land.
I know your winters well, inside and out.
Your land is thin and cold but lovely in the flowering season,
the ledges gone now to contours of wire grass and bedstraw.
Abram wouldn't like to see it so. I do.
And I think you might have liked me, in your world, not now.
There isn't much left around here of the things you knew.
Only the woodchucks, they'll stay with you.
If you missed anything in life learn it from them.
They know all the fundamentals. They're good company.
They'll sleep with you all winter. I have to go now.
Your wild strawberries are small but sweet, Mary.
I've set your stone as straight as I could and wedged it.
It ought to be all right for a century more.
Lord knows when I'll be coming this way again,

Mary, daughter of Abram and Maria Sheldon.

— LOUIS STODDARD