

The Recent Crisis in Spanish Neutrality

"THE broken thread in the European history of Spain has not been resumed," a harsh critic declared not long since. The Spanish have never forgiven Dumas père for saying "With the Pyrenees begins Africa." But those of us who go southward to Spain to-day cannot but feel that with the Pyrenees ends the Continent. Three years of war, even in Biarritz, with all its sans-gêne, changes something in the temper of the people. In Spain, we feel a certain absence of tension, hear louder laughter, and are struck by the multiplicity of color, and that people, even now, whitewash their buildings. If we talk with the people, we find that they have forgotten, between wars, the few words of their military vocabulary, and that this war seems very far off. They speak of it anxiously as something which, if nearer, would interfere with "fiestas" and "corridos." These miscellaneous first impressions return on later visits and frequently give a clue to seemingly inexplicable contradictions.

Parliamentary practice and the absence of popular control in Spain are much closer to the dramatic days of "pronunciamientos" than to the corresponding parliamentary institutions in either France or England. Abrupt interpellations and explosions in the House do not necessarily precede the resignation of the Cabinet. When a Spanish Premier finally decides to withdraw—if others do not decide for him—he opens tenebrous negotiations with the Leader of the Opposition. At the proper moment the press spreads mysterious rumors, and chance may have it that there are strikes or local riots. Abruptly the press announces the change, the old Cabinet goes out, while the new, already formed, steps in. Then the people are confronted with a fait-accomplí. Count Romanones respected these small conventions when he withdrew from the Premiership, the latter part of April. There were the mysterious rumors, answered by his equally vigorous denials (these also for the sake of form), and finally the startling news of the fall of the Cabinet appeared together with the names of the new Ministry. Romanones, in his published resignation to the King, justified his act in the light of the recent dangers without, menaces which might have obliged him to modify his policy of scrupulous neutrality. In the face of the opposition of many of his party, and in disaccord with public opinion, he did not feel warranted in following this new path. The Spanish are usually inclined to take these formal declarations as pretexts, and to look for the real reason elsewhere. But in the light of the new submarine warfare, and the anxiety which followed, it is probable that Romanones gave a real reason for passing on the power to an out-and-out neutral, Garcia Prieto.

Romanones, despite his policy, has never been a fervent neutral. His antagonists had never forgiven an article in the *Diario*, entitled "Neutralities Which Kill," known to have been written or inspired by him in 1915, before returning to power. In this same line of thought, he exclaimed to me in the early part of the winter, when talking of the possibility of unity of action among neutrals: "This is easy to imagine, but difficult to realize. Every neutral has particular interests which draw it towards one or another of the belligerents. At bottom, there are no neutrals."

The crisis of April was precipitated by a difference in the Cabinet over a note to Germany in protest against the sinking of the *San Fulgencio*. Romanones is supposed to have wanted vigorous action, while others advised greater caution. The fact that Birrell and Alba have again taken portfolios, this time in the all-neutral Cabinet, indicates the probable line of cleavage.

This protest, which Romanones sent by diplomatic valise to Berlin on the eve of his demission, suggests in its wording a possible modification made by Prieto, the new Premier, before it reached its destination. He could easily have done this by telegraph. The first part of the note is comprehensible. It contains a protest against this latest German violation of international law and reaffirms the imperious duty of the Spanish Government to protect Spanish lives. But the conclusion shows signs of modifications by Prieto. It plaintively reproaches Germany for not recognizing this "oft-reiterated right by a country which feels no cooling in her friendship, nor weakening in her determination to remain neutral."

Could any appeal be less likely to stop torpedoes? Even traditional Spanish courtesy cannot cover such an anti-climax. But Prieto, to all indications, will keep Spain neutral "e'en tho' the heavens fall." His credo, shortly after taking office, makes further comment superfluous: "I am to-day the same man I was yesterday, and that I have always been. . . . My ideas as to what should be the policy of my country have never varied."

If Spain could enclose herself with Himalayas, like Tibet, and could then find a way to grow wheat on a granite pile, her problem would be solved. But Spain is on the European continent, and as a "Halbinsel" is so nearly an island that her dependence on the sea is absolute. Without American wheat people will starve, and without British coal factories are shutting down. Her shipping problem with the new submarine warfare becomes more and more serious. Spain has already lost more than 14 per cent. of her tonnage, thirty-four ships, and looks ahead with anxiety to the day when she may have to become entirely self-sufficing. Neutrality in such conditions would appear to have scant charm.

Maura, the former Conservative Premier, declared to the applause of 20,000 admirers in the Plaza de Toros that the resolution of Spain not to enter the war was a determination which preceded all others. Señor Cambion, President of the Council of State, makes neutrality an Eleventh Commandment: "I cannot conceive of a Spaniard so malicious or so mad as even to think of breaking our sacred and intangible neutrality. Such a Government would commit a treason to the state to which I would never be an accomplice directly or indirectly." Even the King, at the opening of the recent Scientific Congress of Seville, paid homage to this neutrality: "Thus Spain is carrying on the cult of Science, while other countries are playing their part in the great tragedy."

The question whether glorified neutrality would justify Spain in remaining neutral at any price was clearly posed when a succession of Spanish-American states followed the example of the United States and severed diplomatic relations with Germany. The entry of Cuba brought the war still closer home to the Spanish people. It would be necessary to understand the deep sentiment the Spanish still feel for the Spanish-Americans to appreciate the emotion this news created. Immediately the moral issue came to

the level of the many economic problems Spain will have to solve in the near future. The sentiment of the Spanish for their former colonies is much the feeling of secret pride that a mother has for a wayward son who achieves success. They have the proud consciousness that Spanish is their common language, and that Spain has remained their "Spiritual Home." Among the people, this feeling is even stronger than in other classes. I recall recently in Madrid a welcome performance given to a Spanish dancer returned from a transatlantic tour. She sang of her triumphs in all of the South American capitals—"homage which she now laid at the feet of mother Spain." The audience were carried off their feet with enthusiasm.

Would Spain sever her last ties and see her old colonies rotate in the orbit of the United States? The operation would be a painful one, and many Spanish who do not belong to the "timidos," the "generation of '98," have reacted against this possibility. Lerroux, the radical Republican leader of Barcelona, regrets that his country has "lost the opportunity to come out of her lethargy and put herself at the head of the nations of Spanish origin." He sees the state as a "ship without a rudder, washed about in a storm, where the statesmen at the helm can only trust to fate to keep her off the rocks. Nothing has been thought out, no preparation made for such a critical period by the King, the Ministers, or the Cortes." Señor Cambo, leader of the Regionalists, makes the same reproach and concludes that, even without the handicap of war, the Spanish Government "no hace nada ni para mañana ni para hoy." This pessimism is that of two small minority leaders, but it is none the less symptomatic of the anxiety among certain thinkers at the lack of direction in their Government.

Spanish neutrality—different from that in Switzerland, where the complexity of ties to all the belligerent neighbors would make war fratricidal and possibly disrupt the country—is based on the detachment from most of the immediate interests of the war. When Italy declared her neutrality and later joined the Allies the danger that the Mediterranean would become a dominant war zone, where Spain would find her hand forced for one or the other of the belligerents, was minimized. Neutrality in these circumstances was not only legitimate, but the normal course to follow.

That three years of peace have been for Spain a period of relative prosperity and that the country has nothing materially to gain and much to lose by going to war, none will deny. Were the Peninsula to enter for one group of belligerents or the other she would probably be no better fed and no more likely to receive Mediterranean concessions than if she stayed out.

This is the reasoning of most of the Spanish "Neutralisti." But submarine warfare and increasing difficulties in transportation have considerably modified the original detachment of the country from the great issues of the war. Neutrality at any price involves a serious moral issue. By raising it to so high a pinnacle, the Spanish would seem to forget that neutrality is a means and not an end, and that by eulogizing it in the face of loss of life and property, they pay homage to indifference. Spain has need of a long period of material prosperity, but also has need of a moral regeneration which many most concerned with this future do not see in the path she at present chooses to follow.

SANFORD GRIFFITH

Madrid, May 14

Correspondence

AGES IN THE CIVIL WAR

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: In your issue of May 31 is a note from Horatio S. White stating on the authority of Charles P. King that there were in the Civil War eight hundred thousand Union soldiers less than eighteen years of age. More than six years ago I heard an army officer of high rank using similar figures, and not being able to get his source of information I applied to the War Department and received the following reply from Gen. F. A. Ainsworth, adjutant-general:

A tabulation falsely claiming to set forth what the records in the office of the Adjutant-General of the army show with regard to the ages of soldiers at enlistment during the Civil War appeared in the public press about six years ago. The data in the accompanying table were evidently obtained from that baseless and misleading tabulation.

The fact that no compilation showing the ages at which men serving in the Civil War entered the service has ever been made by the War Department, which is the only Department that has the records from which a reliable compilation of such statistics can be made, should be sufficient to show that figures such as those given in the accompanying table have no official basis and are entitled to no credit whatever.

You will note that Gen. Ainsworth unqualifiedly condemns such statistics, declaring that no such compilation has ever been made by the War Department, which alone has records.

C. MERIWETHER

Washington, D. C., June 11

SENTIMENT IN THE WEST

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: The article on "Pacifism in the Middle West," by Mr. Philo M. Buck, jr., reminds one forcibly of Lowell's timely and vigorous exhortation, "For God's sake, Godkin, don't be omniscient." The Olympian detachment and calm and conscious superiority with which Mr. Buck classifies the unclassifiable and unhesitatingly sets down as uniform the varying sentiment of the Middle West, and generally damns the Middle West for bucolic inaccessibility to ideas, would be annoying if it were not amusing.

Sentiment in the Middle West is as variant as in the East. Middle Westerners are but Easterners "once removed," and in most cases the "removal" has made not for such narrowness of vision and logical incapacity as Mr. Buck attributes generally to the Middle Westerners.

Underlying Mr. Buck's article are two fundamental misconceptions: first, that the Middle West needed to be educated up to the Eastern standard of ideal patriotism and, secondly, that it is the Middle West and not the character and extent of the war which has changed. The East has been swayed by a more or less hysterical fear of invasion and devastation by the Hun. Possibly because it was less affected by immediate interest than the East, the Middle West saw perhaps more clearly than the East did that the war in its origin and outset was entirely a European quarrel with which, by both tradition and logic, we had no active concern. The Central Powers planned a Balkan bonfire, under cover of which they hoped to loot their neighbor's goods. Unwittingly and contrary to their intention, they kindled a world conflagration.