IN THE WINGS

Henry Brinton

CHAPTER VII (Spain)

After the visit to Spain and the publication of the report, there began a period, as crowded as ever, but devoted to rather scattered jobs concerned with Spain. I think that when it was first suggested to me that I should write something dealing with the religious background to the conflict I sat down and wrote about twenty thousand words, which would make a short book. Unfortunately, the manager of the firm set up to publish for the Embassy decided that what had been written on the historical background did not need repeating. I thought, and still think, he was wrong, as I did over a good deal of propaganda emanating from official sources. I am quite clear that even those who still take an interest in the Spanish Civil War, which was in many ways a curtain-raiser to our own, are mainly ignorant of the historical events that shaped both the nature of Spanish politics and determined the course of the war. Be that as it may, the document which emerged was, in my view, incomplete, though I am otherwise reasonably pleased with it. It certainly had a satisfactory circulation. The Embassy posted copies to every clergyman and minister in the British Isles, and I think it did something to correct the lopsided view, which Franco had succeeded in spreading.

I was told afterwards that Franco had put a price on my head. I should have thought that that was almost certainly apocryphal, though I believe that I was extremely unpopular in Fascist circles for putting up an amended version of the religious issues. At any rate it was a long time after the war before I dared to go to Spain. It was not that I feared being imprisoned openly for what I had done; but in a police state it is easy enough to be framed on a bogus offence. It was only when I saw that

Ernest Hemingway had been officially welcomed that I decided that if Hemingway had become persona grata it must be safe enough for me to venture to show myself in the country. Even then, I was careful to get my visa from a provincial consulate.

It was a strange feeling being back in Spain which was still steeped in poverty. We drove from end to end, from San Sebastian to the Gibraltar border at San Roque, without seeing a bulldozer or a tractor. Everywhere the fields were being worked by teams of oxen and late on Saturday evenings gangs of workmen were carving roads out of the bare mountain-side with picks and shovels. Franco had landed in Algeciras Bay with his moors and proceeded to shoot a large number of people at San Roque for holding the wrong political opinions. It was difficult to get people to talk but, when they did, one could not fail to see what vivid memories they held of that blood-bath.

The regime was not only harsh but corrupt. A stretch of newly built road, which was just completed when we arrived, was washed away a few days later. The embankment on which it ran had been made of sand. There was no prosecution; the contractor was a cousin of the local judge. Smuggling was quite open; one learned to recognise the men who ran almost daily through the field by the shape of the packages of coffee and tobacco they carried. The Algeciras road was patrolled by Guardia Civil, with the black tricorn hats and loaded carbines, but they were never at the places where the smugglers crossed the road. There had been a good deal of ill-feeling when we arrived. For form's sake a very occasional arrest was made. Just recently, a San Roque boy had taken his father's place because he was ill, and by

bad luck the Guardia happened to choose that day to pounce. The boy had not had the rules explained to him. He did not stop when challenged, and was shot and killed by the Guardia. Feeling ran high for a time. That there was an understanding was proved to me once. I bought some coffee in a shop in Algeciras and had asked if it was fresh. There was a municipal policeman standing at the counter waiting to be served, but that did not stop the shopkeeper from saying indignantly: "Of course it is fresh. It was only bought in from Gibraltar yesterday."

Entry to Gib. was a tiresome formality. One was only allowed back into Spain three times on any one visa. As it was where one did one's shopping from San Roque, that was soon used up, and one could not get a fresh visa inside Spain, which meant crossing to Tangier and getting a new visa from the Spanish Consul there. My daughter was mildly ill and I wanted to take her to a doctor in Gib., but I had used up my visa and my wife had exhausted hers. There was nothing for it but to go over to Tangier, which I did grudgingly. Afterwards I got Kenneth Robinson to raise the whole question of the difficulties of getting to Gib. on an adjournment in the House. By chance the House adjourned early and the debate was considerably extended. The story sounded well: the sick child, whose father had to go to Africa for a visa, so that he could take her to see a doctor.

Things got worse instead of better, and the Spanish have now closed the frontier altogether. They are a little unbalanced about Gib. Apart from the fact that the Rock has been British a bit longer than it was Spanish, the best contemporary practice is to give first consideration to what the inhabitants want, and the people of Gib. would, almost to a man, hate to become Spanish citizens.

This is straying from the subject, and a vast change has taken place in the last ten years. It used to be impossible to move a few yards without being begged off by a scarecrow. Now everyone seems to have a moped, at least along the coast; while a drive from the airport at Malaga along the coast towards Gib. means passing one newly built concrete and chrome hotel after another. Outwardly it gives a greater impression of prosperity than a drive along the French Riviera. How much poverty and discontent is buried below the surface, it is hard to tell. In the Basque provinces, things seem much as they were, with mass arrests and torture everyday affairs.

Now that Franco has at last departed there will inevitably be great changes, though what form they will take is a matter of speculation. Spain is a land where violence is never far below the surface. But up to about a decade ago, it was the very general opinion that the people had had enough of it. The terrible holocaust of the Civil War was thought to be so much in the memories of people that another one was unthinkable. But all memories, however deep and poignant, fade at last. By now no one under middle age has a personal memory of the war. It would be a brave man who, studying recent events, would say that anything was impossible, especially in Spain. Those who love her can only pray that she will be spared another agony, though her history does little to support that hope.

To return to the main thread, I was a member of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, under the chairmanship of the Duchess of Athol, widely but most inaccurately known as The Red Duchess. She was anything but red. She had been a Junior Minister under a Conservative Prime Minister and on most subjects was a notable reactionary. Her only progressive streak was

her warm championship of legality in Spain. I thought her often less than wise, but her heart was passionately involved in the cause she had espoused.

One small job I took on, insignificant in itself, was the start of a deep involvement. I undertook to drive an ambulance down to Grimsby for shipment. I regretted it when I collected the vehicle in Oxford Street. It had wide sides, and there was no rear view except from two minute reflectors, which showed practically nothing. Getting out of London was a nightmare. At Grimsby, I got a call from Wilfrid Roberts, a Liberal Member who was Hon. Secretary of the Committee, asking me to buy £5,000 of food and medical supplies to load on the ship which left the next day. I found it astonishing how much one could buy for £5,000 in those days. As nothing was any good that could not be loaded the same afternoon, the assignment did not prove too easy; but it was completed just in time.

It was somehow in connection with that dash to Grimsby that I became involved with Leah Manning, a Labour Member, and member of the Committee. I am not very clear about the sequence of events. I remember that at one stage it was agreed that we would go to Spain together, though I cannot remember why. In any case, Leah went without me to Bilbao, which was then under close siege. There was also a doctor there, Dick Ellis. Between them, they thought up the plan to take a group of children away from the dangers of the siege and the equal dangers of famine and disease. They did an incredible job. They arranged with the Spanish Government to borrow a passenger ship to carry the small refugees to England. They sold the plan to the Duchess and the Committee and, marvellous to relate, so worked on the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, that he agreed to allow two thousand children into the

country if we found the accommodation. I think we accepted a little light-heartedly. Children by the thousand take a good deal of arranging for, especially in a country like England, with her lack of experience of a refugee problem, and her fondness for regulations, both local and national. We employed an experienced refugee worker, with great experience of coping with refugees by the thousand and nothing but make-shift preparations. I went down to Southampton where the children were due to arrive, to help with the arrangements. It turned out to be the most hectic and heart-breaking job of my life.

My first job was to find a site, and I hired from a farmer a huge field at Chandlersford, and Wilfrid Roberts laid on a supply of bell-tents and marquees. It then remained to get the tents erected and things like latrines dug, and field kitchens sited and set up. In the meanwhile, the red tape began. It seemed to me that none of the officials had a glimmering of understanding or shadow of compassion. I do not know whether it was the local officials or the senior Civil Servant from the Ministry of Health who seemed to live in the place who was most obstructive and unhelpful. On the whole, I think the Ministry man took the prize. He certainly did more to bring the enterprise to disaster than anyone else. Unfortunately I fell foul of the Duchess, whose heart was a good deal stronger than her head. I asked permission to employ medical and nursing staff, and was told that the money, which began to pour in, was subscribed to feed the children, not to employ staff. I must make do with volunteers. By the grace of God I was brave enough to ignore the instruction and hire four doctors and a qualified sister. I was also sure that we should need some permanent structure where we could put children who

were sick, but not dangerously ill. I was lucky enough to borrow, rent free, a big house close to the camp, and got gas laid on. The workmen digging the trench were splendid. They worked through the Bank Holiday week-end without a penny of overtime. For that also I had my head bitten, though action against me was limited to words, and I never heard any more about the nurse and doctors. About halfway through the preparations a bombshell burst. Sir John Simon who must have been worked on by the Fascist sympathisers, of whom there were many, both in the House, and out of it, suddenly withdrew permission for the children to come. It was catastrophic. Leah Manning was a great one for sending cables. I remember one which started: "My dear Mr. Brinton, surely you at least realise ...." There now began a deluge, though what I got was only a tithe of what came to the Duchess, and Wilfrid Roberts followed in person. Leah and Dick Ellis flew back and went to see the Home Secretary. She was a magnificent woman, built on ample lines and nearly irresistible in action. So powerfully did she work on the Minister, that he changed his mind again, and extended his permission to four thousand instead of two. The committee in London gladly accepted, though I shall never be quite sure whether they were right or not. With an ounce of understanding from local and national officials, it would certainly have been the right decision - almost anything would have been better for the children than where they were. But four thousand children in a field, with so few facilities, and with inadequate time to prepare for half the number, was a great responsibility, involving not a little risk. I really don't know. Anyhow, they were coming.

As the time of their arrival drew closer, things got more hectic. Leah was expecting a real welcome, picturing at least a feast ready on arrival for

the hungry children. Under orders from officialdom, a very different welcome was awaiting them. We had instructions that first thing on arrival each child should be deloused. This involved giving them all a bath and shaving their heads. On the morning of their arrival, when the ship was already making its way along the Solent, I had a telephone call from the Home Office, ordering me to see that each child had a metal disc, the discs to be numbered one to four thousand and corresponding to the list of the children arriving. It was Saturday, and I asked where they thought I was going to get that quantity of numbered discs from in Southampton on Saturday morning. And then I told them what they could do with their numbered discs. Certainly there was a list of children but, from the experience I gained later and from what I knew about Spanish organisation, I had the gravest doubts as to whether they had been individually checked as they came on board. Conditions were fairly chaotic in the besieged city.

It was a glorious day, and I went down Southampton Water in an R.A.F. launch to meet the ship. We knew from radio messages we had had from the ship that most of the children had been very sea-sick, and some of them actually ill with sickness. But I found a shipload of noisy, happy children. As children will, they had recovered completely the instant the ship passed Hurst Castle and came into sheltered water. I did not much enjoy telling Leah that, not only was there no civic welcome with buns and strawberry jam, but that the children were being whisked in buses to be bathed and have their hair cropped, girls as well as boys.

Back at the camp things were not well. The commandant had finally been driven to the edge of sanity

by the officials wanting to know things like how many cubic feet there would be in the tents for each child. He had completely lost his voice. Wilfrid Roberts came to the conclusion that he was not well enough for the job and would have to be replaced. Poor man, he had done a great job, but no one who cared first for the children could have stood the harrassment. I had had my own share and I could judge what he had had to bear. Really there was no choice. I had been on the spot since the job started and was the only person who had any clue to the set-up, even if it was only a knowledge of shortages. I had no qualifications and no previous knowledge of camping; but I was all there was immediately available; I must take over for the time being at least. If I had had any clue to what I was letting myself in for, I am not sure that I would have taken it on. Ignorance was far from bliss; but it was enough to stop me from shirking an obvious duty.

I found myself in charge of a field, with four thousand children, a thousand assorted voluntary workers, a hundred and fifty Spanish teachers and fifteen Catholic priests. The only people who had jobs assigned to them were me and the gate-keeper. There was a glare of publicity. The venture had caught the imagination of the British people other than the officials. I am told that we made a record by holding the front pages of the national dailies for nine consecutive days. Certainly it was the only time that it has been reported in the national press that I was wearing a clean shirt! But the cup of bitterness was filled when it was discovered next morning that there was typhoid in the camp. It was only one case the first day, but that was one too many. At least it was a comfort that I had laid on medical staff. It was they who

picked up the presence of the disease before it had time to spread.

In all conscience the threat was serious enough. A field, with open-air latrines, was an ideal set-up for an epidemic. That we avoided one was due to luck and the excellence of the doctors. Naturally the public health officers had a field day. We closed the camp to visitors, and those people who were allowed in, including the staff, had to walk through a tray of disinfectant. Immediately I was presented with a nasty problem. The head doctor came and asked whether he should innoculate the staff and the children against typhoid. I asked him what the pros and cons were. As far as I remember, he said that it would prevent those who were not already infected from catching it; but anyone who already had the disease though he had not yet developed the symptoms, would be made more ill, possibly fatally. I suggested that it was a decision for him, but he declined the responsibility and would not even offer advice. For the first time I felt glad of the doctor from the Ministry of Health who, so far had done nothing but get in everybody's hair, and sought him out for advice. He point-blank refused to give any, saying that I must decide myself.

Reluctantly I accepted responsibility, though I thought it hard that it should be thrust on me, and told the doctor to get on and innoculate. It was no small undertaking. In the first place we ran the Lister Institute out of serum, and had to send a car to Liverpool for more, but we got it done. I think I was the only one out of well over five thousand who was not innoculated. I dare not take the risk of a bad reaction, and having to take time off. There were so many emergencies. Almost at once the Ministry doctor sprang another on me.

It was intended to start clearing the camp immediately. One or two organisations like the Salvation Army had arranged to take quite substantial numbers, and all over the country committees were springing into being to set up homes which would take perhaps fifty at a time. Several parties were supposed to be leaving immediately; but it seemed to be extremely irresponsible to take the very real risk of starting a nation-wide epidemic. By that time we had half a dozen cases, with no reason to suppose that there would not be many more. I pointed this out to the Ministry doctor, but he just repeated his order that I was to clear the camp as quickly as possible. In despair, I rang up Wilfrid Roberts for advice, but found him not very helpful. He said that if I did what I was told, I could not be held responsible for the consequences. I was not worrying about blame. I was concerned with the fear of promoting an outbreak. I had a brainwave. I sat and rang up the M.O.H.'s of the areas to which the children were scheduled to go and explained the position factually to them. Their reactions were unanimous. If I sent the children, they would be sent straight back. I did not send them and God was good to us. After the first batch there were no more. It was later a subject for speculation in the medical press, and no one afterwards could say how disaster was avoided. I have always thought that it was due to three factors: innoculation, careful medical supervision and the fantastically dry and fine weather - probably the last as much as anything. The careful medical supervision had its drawback. The doctors were watching like hawks for the first signs of typhoid and anything else was in danger of being missed. One child was pretty bad with diptheria before it was diagnosed.

I had an example of my own cowardice. I used to go down to the local hospital to visit one of the

girls with typhoid who had been taken there. Normally, I was made to wear a white gown and a mask and only allowed as far as the door of the room. One day I turned up at the same moment as the doctor, who took me along with him. No gown, no mask, and we charged straight in and sat down on the bed. I sat on it too, because I was much more frightened of seeming frightened than I was of actually touching the small patient.

It was a wonderful relief when the shadow was lifted and we were able to open the camp again. That was when the News Chronicle recorded that: "The commandant, Henry Brinton, was going round with a clean shirt and a pleased smile." Apart from the typhoid epidemic there never was, I was lucky in other respects, I had recruited for a deputy, Paymaster Rear Admiral Bennet who was a remarkably quiet and efficient helper. It was not only for his outstanding efficiency, but it made an intolerably difficult job just tolerable to have such a man to share the load. In all the difficult decisions he was there to share the problems. If it was not one thing it was another. When we were clear of typhoid, I thought that was the end of the trouble instead of only the beginning. The first slap of fate may have been partly my fault. At the start, I had got a supply of volunteer drivers from town who would take it in turn to come to the camp and drive the staff shopping or to the movies in Southampton. Of course we had had to cancel the service while we were in strict isolation. Wanting to re-establish the service, I asked a local reporter to put in a piece asking the volunteers to report again for duty. I suppose I should have had enough sense to keep an eye on him, but I was not even told when he came to visit the camp. In a spirit of pure helpfulness, he scented a story and got a photographer down from the Daily Mirror. The first time I knew anything

about it was when I had a telephone call early one morning abusing me and saying that I was quite unfit to be in charge of young girls. When, very puzzled, I asked what I was supposed to have done, he referred me to that day's Mirror. It was only the first of a number of calls and, later, letters, all in highly critical terms. I hastily sent for a copy of the Mirror. There I found, on the centre page, a picture of six of the prettiest of the young Spanish teachers, with a caption which read: "These senoritas seek a knight on wheels." And then in smaller type: "After the tedium of life in camp, motorists are being asked to volunteer to take the young teachers at the Basque Camp for an outing. Interviewed today, the commandant, Henry Brinton, said: 'Motorist well-wishers who would like a Spanish senorita as a companion for a drive will be very welcome.' Another official added: 'Many of them are very beautiful.'" I need hardly say that I had spoken no word to any reporter, and I could not find anyone who had. I had not even been told that there was a photographer in camp. I rang up my solicitor, who did not happen to be in. I left a message asking him to look at the centre page of the Mirror and ring me back. He rang me shortly, very disturbed, and told me that he had issued a writ, without even waiting to ask what had happened. It weighed on me heavily till long after the camp was finished. The results were almost incredible. We were deluged with telephone calls, letters and telegrams. A typical one read: "Arrive Eastleigh 3.30. Please arrange for second senorita from left to meet." The camp was besieged with young men in sports cars. I had to get the police to mount guard and turn them back. We had three telephone lines. I had to get the post office to cut off the incoming calls, apart for one line of which I kept the number secret except for the Committee

in London. I suppose I lived it down; but it was not an experience I should careto go through again.

When the typhoid scare and the motorists had ebbed, I did think that I was through the worst; but the biggest headache was only just starting. The children were very high-spirited, and it was quite impossible to keep them within the boundaries of a single field. They would get out and go exploring the countryside. This was known as "running away", and the press would harp on it. One day we had a visit from the Bishop of Winchester who was troubled. He said that he was anxious to do all he could to help, but it was difficult when there were so many criticisms to which he did not know the answers. I undertook to provide the answers. The only criticism of substance was the "running away". And I could only say that in essence it was true. I could only invite the critics to suggest what there was that could be done about it. Afterwards the Bishop became our strongest supporter and was very kind to me into the bargain. Whenever I could escape for a few hours, I would go over to the Palace, and have a blessed bath and lounge for tea in a comfortable armchair. The problem of absenteeism was never solved. One effort I tried was to wait till late at night when the children should have been asleep, and then send parties of teachers and interpreters with torches to go round tent by tent, waking up the children and making lists of their names. At the end there would be the mammoth task of comparing the names on the nominal roll. I had little faith in the scheme because I doubted whether, if we got all the names, they would tally with the nominal roll.

In the end the scheme fell down for quite a different reason. If we had had all the children in a

building, or even a series of buildings, we could have shut them in rooms or buildings and let them out one by one, taking names as we let them out. But they were not in buildings, they were in tents. The moment the teachers had gone, the kids would slip out under the edges of the tents and go to call on friends. The teachers soon found that they were finding children whom they knew they had already listed. The party had to be called off.

One day the Duchess was down and had some of the children who had "run away" brought to her, and asked them why they did it. They replied, with the cunning of childhood, that they were hungry and were looking for food. The Duchess's soft heart was wrung, and she sent for chocolate and gave it to them. The numbers of kids loose in the countryside immediately doubled.

I tried everything I could think of without success. Nothing could alter the unpalatable fact that, for all I knew, there could be a child lying dead in a distant hedgerow. The only things that might have worked would have been done when the children arrived, and it was no use crying over spilt milk. The press, which on the whole had been very kind, began to agitate. The Committee began to take fright and, understandably, thought that they must have someone in charge with experience of dealing with large numbers under canvas. I was summoned and the point put to me. I could hardly object. I had put my inexperienced hand to the plough, and felt in duty bound to agree to stay until the new hand had found his way round. They picked on a major from the army, who had wonderful qualifications, and I could only wait and see what clever solution he would find. Things were not too happy. No one likes to be superseded, even if the

justification is clear. The Admiral, who had been a prop for so long, walked out in a huff, because he thought that I was badly treated. I did not, if for no other reason than because I had found a basic truth.

Taking life as a whole, I have always found that one gets a fair recognition, but that on any given occasion praise and blame bear little relationship to what one has done. I think I did a better job than I have ever done and was superseded. On the other hand, I have often had great praise when none has been earned. In any case, there were no miracles. I remember the day when the Major arrived. The only question he seemed to have to ask me was what time the staff had dinner, and seemed taken aback when I said they would be lucky to get any.

The next day he made his attempt at solving the problem which had defeated me. He hired a considerable number of men - the Duchess apparently had no objection for once to having paid staff - and armed the men with sticks, and set them round the perimeter of the field to stop the children from getting out. The results were spectacular but predictable. The children had the time of their lives. There was paid staff to play hide and seek with them. It made a glorious game. Nothing less than an army could have effectively patrolled a field that size. Most of the camp was out by mid-morning, when the Major called the off/guard. The next day there was an emergency, when I could have been glad of someone to take the responsibility off my shoulders. The Major had taken a day off to go to the races.

The day brought the news on the B.B.C. that Bilbao had fallen to the Fascists, and there was a dilemma. I knew the children would take the news badly, but it

could not be kept a secret long. With a thousand volunteer workers, it was bound to leak, and the news would start with a rumour. I could not guess the consequences. Rightly or wrongly, I thought it would be easier to contain if we broadcast the evil news over the loudspeaker system, when everybody was on the alert. As it happened, Sir John Reith, whom I had met at the Bishop of Winchester's, was visiting the camp, and I got him to ring up the B.B.C. and make sure that the news was true. Alas, it was. When the news was given out over the speakers, there was mass hysteria of a kind I had never experienced. Every child had tears streaming down the cheeks and was running round aimlessly, mostly out of the camp. Quite a number were shouting in Spanish that we were Fascists and that the report was a lie. It was a troubled night.

At least I got an insight of how evil stories spread. The American paper Time carried the story of how, when the news of the fall of Bilbao was known in London, the Director General of the B.B.C. went down to Southampton and broadcast the news against the wishes of the staff. They followed this phantasy with a grossly exaggerated account of the "riot" which followed. It was my last crisis at the camp. Several of us had started a scheme for Audrey Russell, a doctor who had been with the children in Spain, and me to go to the States to raise money to bring other children over from Santander, which was then coming under siege. The camp was rapidly emptying into homes around the country, and I felt I had done all that I usefully could at Chandlersford. We formed an unofficial committee, including Lord Horder, who had a beautiful house at Petersfield, raised enough money for expenses, and were back in business. The venture went

wrong from the start. At the last minute, Audrey Russell backed out, leaving me far from comfortable. I felt I had committed myself and reluctantly agreed to go by myself. At least it made an extraordinary change, moving from the discomfort and tribulations of the camp to five days of complete rest and the luxury of a passage on Queen Mary, which was then almost new.

It was my first visit to America. I was wearing clothes that were suitable for an English winter or spring, which presented a bit of a problem when I found New York sweltering with a shade temperature of 104. My business was in Hollywood, but I had a contact to pick up first in New York, who would let Hollywood know that I had got there and arrange things like accommodation. The arrangement looked a good one and apparently watertight. The whole enterprise revolved around George Gershwin, who was well-known and liked in the film world, and who had undertaken to take charge of my visit, introducing me to the world of Stars, who were rich and could be very generous, and arranging meetings and discussions. The eggs were in one basket; but it looked a secure basket.

My contact in New York was Sam Goldwyn's secretary, who proved to be emotionally involved in the problem of refugee children, and made me feel wanted and welcome. I booked an air-passage to Los Angeles, and all seemed set fair. The thunderbolt fell just as I was feeling happy for the first time. George Gershwin suddenly died. His death completely overset everyone who knew him well. Sam Goldwyn's secretary, who had been so eager and helpful, was prostrated. As far as everyone I knew was concerned, I might as well go back to England. Perhaps I have a blind spot. I hope that when I die, my family and friends will not waste time

wringing their hands but will throw themselves with extra zest into the causes which I can no longer work for. It was very sad about Gershwin, but he had cared about my Spanish children and had been suddenly robbed of the power to do anything about them. I thought that the least those who had so manifestly loved him could do was to take half an hour off weeping and gnashing their teeth to do his unfinished work for him. It would have been perfectly easy to give me any number of introductions to the people who were already lined up to give me a hand, and I might have got off to a flying start; but I had yet to learn the emotionalism and shallow enthusiasms of the meritricious film world.

I met another aspect of its nasty side before I left New York. I had often heard of it but found the reality at least matched the rumour. I heard that Louis B. Mayer was in New York and remembered that Lord Horder had mentioned having met him. As he was then about the top of the film tycoons, I cabled Horder, asking him to cable back to Mayer, asking him to see me and smooth my way. I ought to have known that it would be easier to stroll in top-boots into a forbidden Eastern temple than to get an interview with a film tycoon. I did get a summons to the presence and went along with no conception of what was in store. I went into the suite with every reason to suppose that I should find Mayer there. I found instead an obvious thug. I had heard that film tycoons went around with a bodyguard of strong-arm men but, coming with a good social introduction, I expected the sort of good manners that I should have got in England.

In the event it reminded me in retrospect of the time I once attended a press reception in Geneva by Dr. Goebbels. It was a pleasant room overlooking the

lake, and good food and drink. But uniformed thugs stood rigidly to attention round the room, looking as if they had just come from beating up some hapless Jew. The food choked me, and I went away feeling as though I was in urgent need of a bath. Mayer's thug made me feel just like that. I am not sure whether Goebbels or he was the more evil man.

I was so taken by surprise, that I let myself be bounced. He said that he expected that I wanted to be shown over some film studios in Hollywood. Before I could get my wits back, I let him extract from me the real purpose of my visit, and I found myself outside the door before I had come to my senses.

There seemed to be nothing for it but to go to the Coast, as Hollywood is known in the trade, and see what I could pick up. First, however, I called in at Philadelphia, where in the suburb of Beyn Mawr I had a number of very distant relatives who smothered me with the most kindly hospitality. I also met the man in charge of the refugee work undertaken by the Society of Friends, a contact which later was fruitful. Then I flew on to Los Angeles. I am sorry now that I flew. It was the only time I have been to the Pacific coast, and flying takes away the feeling of the immensity of the country. Even in those days it was an overnight journey and felt about as far as London to Manchester. One had dinner almost as soon as one got on the plane, had a comfortable bunk to lie in, and woke at Los Angeles in time for breakfast.

I could have gone on on the same ticket to either San Francisco or San Diego and seen a bit more of the country free; but I was far too down in the mouth to go anywhere. I had been booked into the Ambassador Hotel,

a place of great luxury and very pleasant. The Manager must have been a close sympathiser or something, because I only paid a trifling sum for my room, though I never had a meal in the hotel. There was a splendid swimming-pool which I could enjoy and superb grounds; for my meals I popped out and had sandwiches at a drug-store. A meal in the dining room would have cost more than a week's rent of my room. I had a few introductions, though not to the right circles. I was taken bathing in the Pacific, and I did get entertained by a film-star - I think it was Rita Hayworth - in Beverley Hills. It was interesting to see how a traditional star lived but did not advance my cause by an inch, and I decided to call it a day and go back to New York. I booked my flight. Just before I was due to leave I managed to make contact with Frederick March. He turned out to be interested and helpful, and I think I ought to have stayed after all and seen what I could accomplish with his help. However, I was so frustrated, lonely and homesick, that for once, I must confess, I ran away.

I came down first in Washington D.C., where a representative of the Spanish Embassy was to meet me. Washington was totally airless and hot as a furnace, and I had an adventure which I have never been able to explain. The man from the Embassy came in the early evening to give me a drink. He then had to go away for an hour, and was then to come back and give me dinner. I had always wanted to try a mint julep, which I was told had to be sampled below the Mason-Dixon line, and Washington was said to be my chance. Anyhow, I had one, and it was almost the last thing I remembered of that night. I have always been a small drinker, but I was used to small quantities of alcohol. I cannot believe that anyone

tampered with my drink, but no amount of alcohol I had had before or have had since ever had such catastrophic results as that single mint julep. I remember going up to my bed and going straight to sleep. I remember being wakened from a drugged sleep by the telephone ringing to tell me the man from the Embassy had come. And that is the last thing I ever remembered about that night. Presumably I went down and had dinner, but I never remembered anything about it. My next surfacing was the following morning, when I was to catch an early plane to Philadelphia. My "cousin", Howard Brinton, who ran the Swathmore settlement, had invited an influential audience for me to address. I was due there for lunch, with the meeting immediately afterwards. I was again dragged from deep sleep by the telephone, but this time I was in bed in pyjamas. I remembered staring stupidly at my watch, which I sentimentally kept at Greenwich time, and trying to do sums, which made no sense. It was reception, to ask whether I was keeping my room for another night. Hastily I asked the time. It was after midday. There was nothing for it but to scramble out of bed, send a telegram to Swathmore and catch the next plane. At least, I thought, that saved the trouble of thinking up a speech. I was wrong. When I got to Swathmore, I found that Howard and his wife had contrived to find food for the entire audience, who were still waiting for me. Fortunately, speaking always came easily to me, and American audiences are the speaker's dream, which quite spoiled me for a long time after I got home. Not for the first time, in the States, some of the women were using handkerchiefs, and one of them came across with a substantial cheque.

Joyfully, I turned my thoughts to Home; but I was delayed for a time. The Friends asked me to do some meetings for them. It was not what I had come for, but it was all help for Spain. It did not seem to matter much whether the help was channelled through England or America. One meeting I remember well was held in the drawing-room of Mrs. Du Pont's summer house somewhere down on the coast. The Du Ponts, I imagine, are one of the richest families in a country of many rich people. It was an invited audience of personal friends and I made one of my best speeches. What the result was I have no idea, because it would be garnered by the Society of Friends' Relief Committee. Afterwards I was again compelled to make a difficult decision. The Friends were urgent that I should stay and do some more meetings for them, and offered to pay all my hotel and other expenses; but home sickness was attacking me like a sharp pain, which it has never done before or since, unless it was later, when I was kept like a prisoner in Jamaica, and I ran again from my probable duty. There were no ships due from New York, the best available was the ill-fated Empress of Britain from Canada, and I made my first, and short, visit to that country, taking the train over-night to Montreal, and train again to Quebec, and so home. It was a fairly quick and comfortable voyage home, though in far less luxury than Queen Mary. Anyhow, I was travelling second-class, though I managed to get a cabin to myself. My only recollection was of sighting an iceberg at close quarters, glistening magically in the sun. I certainly had a lump in my throat as we passed the Nab tower, which I can see through my window as I write, and came gliding into Spithead and the waters of the Solent, which I knew so well. I had a small cruising

boat, of which I owned a half, lying at moorings in Emsworth, and I thought of it longingly, as we came past Cowes and the host of sails; but that was the nearest I got to it that year.

Fortunately I had no time to grieve over my desertion. I was instantly plunged into work. The first thing on arrival was the news that the Duchess was very anxious to see me and hear all about America. I made a dash and caught a train for Perth, where a car met me and took me on to Dunkeld. The Duchess had meanwhile acquired as secretary Winifred Gell who had been my very efficient aide at the New Outlook. It was a great pleasure to see her again, and hear what it was like working for the Duchess. Otherwise it was an uneventful visit. The next day, the Duke took us on a nostalgic picnic in the muniments room at Blair Castle, the rest of which had become a school. Back in London, I found that Wilfrid wanted me to go over and negotiate with a Vicar General in Malines. As soon as I got back I was sent off again to Geneva, to argue with Eden about refugees. Actually, I did not catch Eden and did my lobbying with his second in command, Lord Cranbourne, then universally known as Bobbity Cranbourne, later to succeed as Marquis of Salisbury and drift over to the right wing of the Conservative party. At that juncture, he was liberal-minded and very approachable. It was the period when the Jews were seeking to escape the Nazi persecution, and a few were trying to come here from Spain. The British Government were being anything but generous. Any refugee allowed in must get a British citizen to guarantee him until he could be self-supporting. The alternative for the Jews was too often to fill their pockets with pebbles and jump into the Rhine. I don't suppose I made

much difference; but I did my best.

After Geneva came another visit back to Spain, which was eventful. The journey out was uneventful. By then the Government had moved from Valencia back to Barcelona. My first appointment was with Juan Negrin, the Prime Minister, but first I needed an interpreter, and I found one of the most fascinating women I have ever encountered, Ilsa Barea. Ilsa was not even Spanish. She was Austrian, and had had to flee hurriedly when Hitler invaded the country. She was staying with her equally interesting husband, Arturo Barea, in the Ritz, where I was also staying. Arturo had survived a long period of work in the most shelled building in Spain, the Telephonica in Madrid, and his nerves were badly affected. As far as I remember he never went outside the Hotel while I was there. I thought that I got to know them really well; but it was years later, in England, when Arturo had made a name for himself as an author, that Ilsa called my attention to a book of his called, I think, The Climax, in which he told the story of that part of his life, even referring to me, that I realised that I hardly knew the most superficial things about them. I found it eerie reading so much of the past, which I had thought I had known at the time.

Ilsa was the best interpreter it has ever been my luck to encounter. Not only was it impossible to catch her out with the most esoteric colloquialism - she said that she had learned her English from P.G. Wodehouse - but she had so good a memory that, instead of translating sentence by sentence, I could tell her what I wanted to say to the person I was interviewing, and only open my mouth when they replied. I am the world's worst linguist, but I had got to the stage where, if I knew what was being

talked about, I could follow the conversation. I felt mildly foolish when we went to see Juan Negrin, the Premier. Ilsa explained that she had come as interpreter. "Oh", said Negrin, "does Mr. Brinton not speak Spanish?" "No", said I, "only about two words." Negrin looked a bit taken aback and Ilsa began a long speech of what we had agreed. It was about the need for better English propaganda. At one stage I interrupted and said to her: "Well, not quite that. What I wanted to emphasise was ..." Negrin looked even more taken aback. Actually I found having to use an interpreter a great advantage. If I understood what was being said, I got an extra bit of time to think up what I would answer.

I can remember my interview with Juan Negrin especially clearly because we had just started our discussion, when an air-raid warning went off and all the lights went out. Unfortunately I am allergic to air-raids. I bore a long trip across the Atlantic at the height of the U boat menace, which was far more dangerous than a modest air-raid, without being in too much of a funk, but loud bangs I have always found hard to endure. Not wishing to show nervousness, I took the precaution of putting a bottle of pheno-barbitone in my pocket. When the lights went out, I reached in my pocket and knocked back a couple of the pills before someone brought lamps in. Almost immediately the all-clear went and the lights came on again. I had been travelling and was tired enough. The two pills had the effect of practically sending me to sleep and, for the rest of the conversation, my main effort was concentrated on the struggle to keep awake. I managed to do that, but I had to rely on Ilsa afterwards to tell me just what had been said.

Another incident which has left a clear memory was my interview with President Aguirre of the Basques. He had sent his car to the hotel to fetch us. As it happened, his villa was on the hill, with Barcelona lying at one's feet, and the vivid blue of the Mediterranean stretching beyond the town. It was a day of glorious sunshine with a sky as blue as the sea, and little round clouds, like puffs of smoke. Actually, I realised they were puffs of smoke from bursting anti-aircraft shells. There was an air-raid in progress. I looked at the vivid yellow of the mimosa trees and the blue sky and sea, feeling incredulous. It was much too nice a day to kill anyone.

A little incident suddenly made it real. One of the shells must have failed to explode and fell in front of the car, burying itself halfway in the tarmac. I said nothing and nor did Ilsa; the chauffeur merely swerved to avoid it. I did not even know whether Ilsa had noticed it. It happened to stick in my memory, and came as a shock when years later, I read Arturo's book. There I read the story of that particular air-raid, with a mention of how Ilsa had been going with me to see the Basque President, and giving local colour, said how the shell had buried itself in our track. She had noticed it, and it must have implanted itself in her memory too.

When we got back to the Ritz, we found Arturo a little shaken. A fair-sized bomb for those days had missed the Ritz but hit the house beside it. My bedroom window was open on that side, and my clothes and bed were heavily coated with dust from the explosion. It was my first experience of an air-raid, and I found myself astounded at the freak of high explosive. The house next door was a high one, and the whole outer wall had gone;

but many of the upper rooms, gaping open, had furniture almost undisturbed and even some pictures still hanging o n the walls, the glass unbroken. Not too far away was what had been a church, which had been housing two hundred refugee children. There were no freaks about that, only death and destruction and pathos. I remembered the four thousand children in England, and was glad that it had been decided to accept the extra two thousand. The risk of losing one, which had loomed so large in the British press, seemed trivial, like the number of cubic feet of air each child should have in a tent. There was still plenty of air where the church had been. I wondered what advantage the "Great Christian Gentleman" thought he was achieving with that kind of raid on an open city.

In any war, the balance-sheet is drawn up by politicians and generals, who never see what their bombs have done. Only the other day I came across an old letter from George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, who really was a great Christian Gentleman, about the abuse and hatred which had been heaped on him because he had dared to speak up in the House of Lords against the carpet bombing of open cities in Germany. People who still defend it, even the case of Dresden, in which there were more people killed than by the atom bomb in Nagasaki, exaggerate the very little harm it did to the German war effort, and ignore the fact that Churchill's absorption with the bombing nearly lost the Battle of The Atlantic, and with it the whole war by starving Coastal Command of long-range escorts. They forget, too, that the large proportion of the Anglo-American resources were concentrated on building bombers, and might have turned out vast extra amounts of arms and close support aircraft. It did pay off at the end. But the war might have been ended earlier, and without so many bitter memories or clouded consciences.

The Observer made me a Saying of the Week when I wrote: "I have long been accustomed to being ashamed of being an Englishman; but it is a new experience to be ashamed of my membership of the Labour Party", when they refused to protest against our refusal of even supplying defensive weapons to the Spanish Government because Hitler and Mussolini might not have liked it. I would not change a word of it, even if I might go back in time.

Spain was getting towards final disaster, but I still remember the sense of purpose even during what was to prove the beginning of the end. Things had got noticeably worse even in the few months since I had last been there. The chickpeas and the acorn coffee seemed even nastier and in even shorter supply. The cheerfulness and fortitude had not diminished, however. I had made friends with Senor Irujo, the Basque who was Minister of Justice in the Republican Government, and an ardent Catholic. I remember well the deep and undimmed faith that was palpable in his private Mass. Private nominally, though I could not find that it was closed to anyone who wished to go.

One little incident caught my imagination, so many stories were told of the ruthless massacres. The Duke of Santa Christina was imprisoned in Barcelona for his own safety, and his wife was staying at the British Mission at Caldetas. He asked for and received permission to be allowed to visit his wife, and was driven to Caldetas. When he got there his guards said that it might be a little late if he went back that day. They would call for him after breakfast in the morning. His only complaint was that he was frightened of being caught up with an attempt at a mass break-out and asked for extra protection not against his gaolers, but against the other prisoners. It

was all very Spanish and reminiscent of the early days of the Republic when members of what proved to be the next Government, wrote their election addresses in prison.

Cigarettes were again my worst deprivation. I had, this time, had the forethought to bring a large box of Players with me, but made the mistake of opening it in the bar at the Ritz when it was full of journalists. The box was empty in no time. I did manage to get a large supply of Greek cigarettes some ship's captain brought in. I would not have believed that anything could taste so utterly repulsive. I used to take one whiff and then throw it away. Gradually I got to two whiffs and then three. I thought that particular agony was over when the British Minister most kindly sent his chauffeur over from Caldetas with a tin of fifty Players for me. I took more care where I opened it. I invited a friend from among the journalists up to my room for a smoke and the usual Brandy. I opened the tin with ceremony. Took one whiff with keen anticipation, and then threw the cigarette away. My taste was corrupted, and I gave the rest of the tin away and went back to my abominable Greek supply. It was a longish time after I got home before I could smoke a real cigarette again.

The Minister did another good turn for me, and that backfired. Ilsa had a thin waif of a girl in tow called Ada. She was a German with, I suppose, Jewish ancestors. Anyway, she had just managed to escape to Spain, with her nerves in very poor shape, and arrived just as the Civil War was breaking out. She had been there right through the war and was almost at the end of a very stretched tether. Ilsa asked me to try to get her to England. I did my best, but it was not easy. She had no papers that the English would accept and needed

a passport, as well as permission to land. The second I could get for her by a personal guarantee; the first, I asked the Minister to try to get fixed, and then send her on. In due course she appeared, bringing me expensive presents she had bought for me in Paris. I wondered how she had been able to afford them. But she said that the Minister had been unbelievably kind and had given her money for clothes, as well as her ticket. It seemed incredibly generous, until I got a letter from him setting out how much he had advanced on my behalf. Money was, in those days, incredibly tight, and I had a job to pay, not least for my own presents. I have a horrid thought that he believed her to be my mistress. There was an odd end to the story. The Ada I had known had been a pale sylph, who looked, with her transparent skin and wraith-like body, as though she would float off on the lightest breeze. I could not find it in my heart to blame anybody for thinking she was someone's mistress. A few months after she got to England, a strong and rather overpowering woman came to call on me, and announced that she was Ada. She would have made the ample form of Leah Manning seem insignificant. I do not know whether it was the change from chickpeas and acorn coffee or the relief from mental stress that had wrought the miracle. I can only pray that she escaped the London blitz.

When I could no longer put off turning for home, I thought I had really ensured a fair departure from Spain. I took great pains over getting my <u>salida</u>, that is exit permit. Senor Irujo kindly sent me his own car to take me to the frontier at la Jonquera, and arranged for the Spanish Consul in Perpignan to send one to meet me at the frontier. It was a most pleasant trip up to the frontier, and the French Customs were most obliging. They offered

to telephone for a taxi to take me to a French station. Gratefully, but not without complacency, I explained that a car was coming for me, and retired to a small cafe, where I made a pig of myself. Nothing has ever tasted one half so good as the mountain of butter on the warm French croissants, washed down by coffee made from coffee beans, not acorns. I barely noticed the time passing, or remembered the Spanish capacity for arrangements that did not work. It began to grow dusk and the sun set in flame behind the Pyrenees before I took alarm, and realised that no car would be coming for me. Humbly I returned to the French Customs and said that, after all, I would accept their kind offer to send a taxi. With a good many Gallic gestures and expressions of regret, they explained that it was beyond their power. The telephone exchange closed at 6 p.m. I returned to the croissants and butter, and at last, in the early hours, my friends at the Customs begged me a ride on a French <u>camion</u> coming through from Spain. I set off contentedly, but very cold, uncomfortable and humiliated, rattling alongside the open cab beside the driver. And so to Narbonne, where there was, in the sharp early morning, a train of kinds to Paris.

Arrived at the Gare Quai d'Orsay, I did my best to overplay my guardian angel. I went at once to the station restaurant and had a good breakfast. Then I climbed into a taxi and had myself driven to the Air France office in time to catch the airport bus. Alas, when we got there I found I had not even money to pay the taxi. I had left my wallet with my passport, ticket to Croydon, and money, English, French and Spanish, on the table at the station. Incredible to relate, my wallet had been found and turned in to the pay desk. I can still only just believe it. By that time the airport bus

had gone and I had to keep the taxi right out to Le Bourget. But, thank goodness, I caught the plane, and actually had enough money to pay the taxi. It was a close call and I remember it along with the later saga of Emery and McGuire at Miami.

That was really the end of my Spanish adventures for the time being. The very last thing as we were starting to slide down to our own war, was the row with the English semi-Fascists, who started scheming to force us to send the Basque children back home. They were powerful, and no holds were barred. I even caught one of them out in a barefaced lie about ships available to take them home. I have always found it difficult, to the point of impossibility, to hate an individual. I certainly could not hate anybody just because they wanted Franco to win. But I did manage to hate one or two when they showed themselves able to use the suffering of children to try and discredit their parents' cause. In the end I was robbed of even my hate. One of the worst, when the war did break out, lied about his age, and deliberately sought death, which mercifully soon found him, acting as rear gunner of an early make of plane. Another, Lennox Boyd, I managed to keep hating, until after the war I met him at a party, and instantly fell victim to his overwhelming charm. I can no longer believe he was anything but genuinely misguided.

Typical of what went on was the story in a right-wing paper of a riot among some Basque boys who smashed the lamps in a Welsh town. What actually happened was that a party, out for a walk, were fooling about and broke the glass of two red lanterns, for which the local committee paid rather less than a pound.