

Features

The following three articles were all originally published in 1937

The War In Spain – A Basque boy tells his story

As part of their school work, the children housed in Street, Somerset, were asked to write essays on the war in Spain. The teacher has not taken the view that it is desirable to repress what is in their minds and emotions. Here is one of the essays. The author is Pablo Uribe, a boy of fifteen, a native of Bilbao. He belonged to the Anarchist Party.

The droning of aeroplane engines overhead, shrieking of warning sirens, bombs explode...the murderous aviators destroy the life of a loyal town. There is crying in the streets. Women run with their children clasped to their breasts. Like wild beasts, mothers crouch to defend the lives of their young. 'The black birds have come to exterminate us.'

Unfeeling tools of a worthless master, where is your conscience that you can do this to us? Do you not understand our parents' anguish when they see us running like sheep from one place to another, maddened with pain, not knowing where to flee? If we run to the bomb-proof shelters, we find them crowded to their entrances, and the bombs burst and kill us. If we throw ourselves to the ground, you swoop down and machine-gun us. Why do you make us civilians the target of your wrath? What satisfaction do you find in our sufferings?

The droning ceases. Once again the hoarse siren tells us that the black birds are gone. The daily air raid is over. Left are the bodies of age-worn men, little children, harmless women, all victims of the tragic flight. We cannot believe the stillness. Our ears still ring with the sound of bombs, and we think that somewhere in the distance another harmless town is suffering as we did. (from *The New Leader*, 20 August 1937)

To The Basque Children Who Are Returning

from a Basque boy who remains

This is to my friends who with me escaped the barbarism and murder of international Fascism, from Franco, the greatest of all monsters. The day on which you go is a sad day in

our calendar. You are going to be "repatriated"; but what sort of a country is that to which you are returning? Certainly it will not be a flourishing and prosperous province of Vizcaya. No! Unfortunately that is not what you will find. Instead you will find Fascist regimentation, a regime based on war and exploitation, and mourning in your homes.

This must lead you to think: why have we got to see his? Who forces us to go and see? These are the questions I have asked myself. And this is the answer that has forced itself on me.

Franco, the man who represents crime and treason. He is the man who is ruining the future of our country. He is the man who wanted to destroy our lives. He has killed our mothers and our brothers, and is trying to kill Spain herself. But he, let us be certain of this, will not kill our magnificent Republic, and he will not conquer the fighting spirit of our freedom-loving people.

Do not go back with the idea that you will have to be slaves of Fascism. Do not let the spectre of doubt cloud your minds. Perhaps in the not so distant future our flag will fly again in the whole of Spain, and the army of the people will carry it in triumph through the streets of Bilbao.

Do not forget you are going to the home of your enemies, of the enemies of the workers, and an enemy of the world, and of God himself. That is why you must hate him.

Do not believe his nonsensical talk, his lies which have long been exposed, nor his lying papers. Forever keep in your mind the vision of the people that rose in arms to defend itself against Fascism and of your flag which is the flag of Freedom and Humanity.

Always despise and hate Fascism and oppression and those who represent it in Spain. – Salud!

(from *The New Leader*, 24 December 1937)

Dances of the Basques

by Howard Fane (who has recently returned from the Basque Country)

In a Hampshire meadow, golden with buttercups, 4,000 Basque children have been in camp, playing and dancing in the happy care-free manner of children the world over. But these kiddies are different, for they come from a race for whom dancing is a craze, and has been for centuries. As long ago as 1659 it was said of the Basque that "a child knows how to dance before it can call its father

or nurse by name," and this is as true today as ever.

There are two main types of dances in the Basque country although there are many varieties of them – the recreational dances such as the *quadrille*, *farandole*, *aurreku*, *fandango* and *sauts*, and those of a ritual nature. The former are of comparatively recent origin, though certainly charming, graceful and picturesque.

I remember one delightful spring afternoon, the hot sun beating down on the golden tanned skins of the dancers, watching the *aurreku* in a small Guipuzcoan village. Several young men entered the circle of spectators, and their leader, or *aurreku* as he is called, sent four of them to pick the maidens of their choice from among the crowd. In a minute or two they returned each with a laughing, chattering Basque lass, before whom they danced with amazing dexterity.

Meanwhile the *atzesku* or young man who brings up the rear, and one or two others, did likewise. In a few seconds, the arena was a revolving stage of twisting, whirling couples in colourful draperies.. This scene is followed by the *aurreku* and *atzesku* taking it in turns to direct the complicated movements of the long chains.

Stranger and more interesting are the ritual dances which are only performed by a privileged few who are trained from childhood to execute the peculiar and complicated steps. Their origin is to be found in the ritual of the spring festival. The fact is that the early churches adapted them as religious dances. Of these, the sword dances of the coastal provinces of Guipuzcoa and Vizcaya performed by men only, are especially quaint to watch.

The dancers, dressed in their white shirt and trousers, sashes and espadrilles, create a vivid picture as they twist and swirl to the music of the instrument each of them plays. Preceded by a standard bearer, the men march into the arena. And at the end of the procession, seven drop on one knee, while the eighth whirls the standard round, sweeping it low over the heads of the others. These movements are then followed by the *zortziko*, the *ezpata* and *jokuo*, danced with swords..

These are perhaps the most interesting and principal dances of the Basques, but there are an infinite variety of others to attract and fascinate. One has only to see the solemnity with which many of the dances are performed to realize what a deep meaning lay behind their origin.

(from *The Carlisle Journal*, 2 July 1937)