

(March 21st, 1938)

The Civil War in Spain

BY CAPT. H. G. SCOTT.

CHAIRMAN T. D'ARCY LEONARD:—Gentlemen, we are very glad to have back at the Canadian Club today, Captain H. G. Scott of Calgary. Ever since he graduated from Edinburgh University as first prize man in International law he has been a close student of political developments in Europe, and has kept in touch with those developments by frequent visits to the continent. In 1933 he addressed the club on Europe with particular reference to Germany and Austria, and the recent course of events in those two countries, has proved that his analysis of the situation was remarkably correct. Last fall he was in Spain, and we are very glad to have the opportunity of hearing from him his own personal experiences of that trip. I am sure they will be of the greatest interest to us.

CAPTAIN SCOTT:—At the outset, speaking of the Spanish war, I would like to make it clear that any ideas that one man could obtain, are necessarily rather sketchy, and confined to, what it was possible for one man to see for himself. That being understood, I would like to tell you something of the background, and the causes that led up to the present Spanish Civil War.

I believe it is not unfair to say, that the civil war is just one more chapter in an old, old story, a story as old as the world, the story of the struggle, between rich and poor, between the privileged classes on the one hand, and the mass of the down-trodden poor on the other. When one says that one must add, of course, that it is absurd to suggest that all the merits are on one side, and all the faults on the other. They never are in any human struggle.

Let us look for a moment at the origins of the civil war. It started with the abdication of the King in 1931. When the king was driven out, he was succeeded by a republican government, a government that was extremely radical, and that government, like so many revolutionary governments, was unable to maintain law and order. It failed to control the more violent sections of its supporters, and as a result dreadful things undoubtedly happened in Spain, and one of the most lamentable things about the civil war is, that on both sides there have been actions of extreme and indefensible cruelty. Things have been done which one had hoped had ceased with the middle ages, and I doubt if either side can throw stones at the other in the matter of cruelties.

These things do happen in a revolution. Beautiful properties were destroyed, innocent people were killed, churches were burned, priests were murdered, nuns were killed, and Spain suffered many terrible things. After two years of this sort of thing, there came the inevitable reaction, the government was beaten, and another took its place.

This government set itself to undo a great deal of what the first government had done. After it had been in power a little while, it was faced with rebellion, a revolt centred mainly in the north of Spain—in the Asturias. It was put down, after severe fighting marked by extreme cruelty. There was one feature of this fighting, that was of immense significance, not only to Spain but to a much wider area of Europe. In order to put down the rebellion, the government brought over Moorish troops. Observe, they imported professional Moorish soldiers, to put down a rebellion of the Spanish people. This was the return of the Moors to Spain, arms in hand, centuries after they had been finally driven out. That is an immense thing for the whole of Europe, as well as for Spain. It means, that the shadow of Africa is spreading over Europe, a shadow that arose, when the French imported troops from their African Empire.

The rebellion was put down, but it left many bitter memories, and shortly afterwards it was beaten at a general election, and was replaced by an extremely radical government in which socialists, communists and anarchists found a place. Again law and order broke down, and in 1936

that had its inevitable result, when officers of the army started the present revolution. That revolution had behind it the officers of the army, and the bulk of what is generally called the ruling class—the great land owners, the great industrialists, and the Roman Catholic Church, and that Church, as you do not need to be told, is overwhelmingly predominant in Spain. Nor is it surprising that the church should support the revolution, for the Communists and the Church are eternally at one another's throats.

That rebellion, at the outset, looked as if it were going to fail. The rebels did not have the rank and file of the army with them, and in the early days they were many times beaten, and some of the generals were captured and shot. Then came again that menacing feature, the bringing of Moorish troops from Africa to Spain—professional soldiers who had no sympathy with the people of Spain. With their coming the fighting took on a fresh aspect. The rebels gained new courage, and the revolt began to look as though it would be successful.

Just at what point foreign intervention entered into the picture I don't know, but it began fairly early on both sides. To the aid of the rebels came contingents from Germany and Italy, and to help the government they came from Russia and from most of the countries of Europe and North America—from Mexico, the United States and Canada.

What was the meaning of that Foreign interference? As far as Germany and Italy are concerned the explanation in the first place is the hate with which dictators regard democracy, and in the second—this was more important—Spain is very rich in minerals which are of tremendous value in making munitions, and Italy and Germany are very interested in munitions.

From the Italian point of view there were other important considerations. Remember that Italy had just completed the Abyssinian campaign, in which she was just taking one step in pursuance of a great strategical design, the purpose of which was the re-creation, in part at least, of the Roman Empire around the Mediterranean. In her attack on Abyssinnia, she had met the definite disapproval of the great democracies, France and Great Britain, and she was bitterly resentful.

Control of Spain is essential to any possible control of the Mediterranean, for that control by a great power is a definite threat to Gibraltar. That in turn is a definite menace to the communications of the British Empire, through the Mediterranean. Control of Spain also means control of the Balearics, and any power that has control of those Islands stands right across the communications of France and her North African Empire, from which she expects to draw large numbers of black troops, in the event of another European war. Control of these Islands, would therefore be a deadly blow to France. That I think, explains the Italian interest in Spain.

With regard to Germany, the same motives hold good, with the added motive, of control of the Canary Islands. Control of these, means a threat to Britain's communications with the Cape of Good Hope, and with the whole of South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand by way of the Cape. German control of the Canaries, would thus involve a great menace to the communications of the Empire.

Why should Russia intervene?—In the first place, because of her sympathy with the Communist Government of Spain, and secondly, because she has never ceased to try to make mischief, since the Bolshevik revolution began.

What was the explanation of the mass of volunteers, that rushed into the fight?—I think they came out of a genuine desire, to support Democracy and freedom. There is a distinction to be drawn between them, and the contingents that came from Germany and Italy. They were genuine volunteers, and the others were not. It is childish to suggest, that the large masses of men who came from Germany, Italy and Russia, did so, without the knowledge and without, in fact, the orders of those governments. Anyone who says otherwise is talking bosh. Both sides had foreign troops who were not volunteers, though the government had some who were.

With the coming of this international interference, there came a great change in the fortunes of war. The rebels made a great spurt. So much so that even the infallible Times was deceived into making one of its more unfortunate forecasts. Late in the autumn of 1936 it published an article on the last hours of Madrid, and explained that Madrid was

just about to fall. Those last hours have lasted one and half years, and Madrid has not fallen yet. The City was saved, by the international brigade, officered by Russians, and composed of the trained men of many nations. Up to that time, the Government had been an armed mob, and the International Brigade gave it breathing space to create an army. Onward from the saving of Madrid the civil war became a fairly even struggle, with the rebels having rather the best of it. Lately the tide of victory seems to have turned very strongly in favor of the rebels. That is a very hasty sketch of the campaign, up to date, but I think it gives you a fairly accurate outline of the rebellion up to date.

I propose to say something of what I saw and heard, before going to Spain, I made some enquiries as to which side it would be best to visit from the point of view of an impartial observer. It was impossible to go to both sides, for if you had been with the government, first you would be regarded by the rebels as a bolshevik, and if the reverse, the government would look upon you as a Fascist.

As the result of my enquiries I learned that if one went to the rebel side one would find that, behind the fighting lines, the country was completely at peace, with railways and transportation systems working regularly, ample food available, and law and order well maintained. But, said my informants, you will not get a very friendly reception at the fighting lines if you are British. Officers will be put in charge of you, ostensibly for your protection, but really to prevent you from seeing what they don't want you to see. But if you go to the government side, they told me, you will find a country completely disorganized, with transportation systems non-existent and food scarce. But as a British subject you will have a friendly reception, and you will be shown as much as they can show you.

I went to the government side.

Before going into Spain, however, I went through Paris, and in doing so learned some interesting and significant facts. It was, for instance, impossible to get government Pesetas in France. The banks were not dealing in them. The travel agencies were the same, and it seemed to be most difficult to get them. Secondly, I could get no information on transportation whatever. Nobody knew when there would

be a train and I could not buy tickets. In the third place I was interested in the police force,—I have always been interested in police work. I was told in Paris, that it was undesirable to have anything to do with the government police in Spain, as they were somewhat disorganized, completely lacking in discipline, and prone to amuse themselves by the popular sport of private murder.

I found that was quite incorrect. I had a good deal to do with them and found them a very kindly lot. I saw nothing at all wrong with them.

I also found in Paris that I could get all the rebel pesetas I wanted. That of course means that the business and financial people of France, even as early as last autumn were betting on a rebel victory.

I crossed the frontier somewhere in the middle of the Pyrenees at a little Iron bridge. The French gave me my final authority to cross and led me up to the bridge. There they said "Fini", and left me to my own devices. I set off across the bridge, and looking back, saw that their faces bore something of the look that one might have expected to see on the faces of Daniel's captors, after they had thrown him to the lions. On the other side was a little post of Spanish soldiers on their own. They fingered their rifles in a disconcerting way and did not look very pleased to see me. They turned out, however, to be very nice men. They examined my credentials in rather casual fashion and then turned me loose into Spain.

Then I noticed a small but rather significant feature of life on the loyalist side. Coinage and currency are very scarce, coinage particularly, and one had at times to take change in the form of postage stamps or street car tickets—not a very favorable sign in any country of its financial standing.

While looking for some means of transport, I ran into a group of English and Americans, a group trying to help the children whose parents had been killed. These people had a little motor lorry, on which a Union Jack was prominently displayed, and they offered to drive me to Barcelona. I went with them and it was a splendid drive. We crossed a pass at 18,000 feet. It was a dangerous road to travel and every now and again we were stopped by the govern-

ment police, who examined our credentials. Half way down we stopped at a small village for refreshments, and while we were having them, a man came up and complained of the dearth of food in the district and of hard conditions generally.

My friends shrugged their shoulders and said "Another anarchist. These fellows have been at one another's throats since the beginning of the revolution." I found this to be more or less the case, and that the government was not very partial to having them as soldiers, because of their menace to discipline. I offered to pay for the refreshments—three brandies and two beers—and when I got the bill, I found I was liable for the enormous sum, of eight cents.

From there we drove to Barcelona and arrived late at night, and found it to be a city in the war zone. Lights were darkened, but it was then not showing any great scars. Since that time, however, it has been repeatedly and heavily bombed; by aeroplanes from the Balearics, and from the sea, by rebel warships. The city showed no signs of panic, nor was there any disorder to be seen in the streets. The most significant sign of war was that all the windows were criss-crossed with brown paper, to save them from the shock of exploding bombs. Food was scarce but not badly so. It was rationed carefully and at the hotels one had to be at meals sharply on time or the food was all used up. There were food queues but they were not long, nor did they seem to have to wait very long for their supplies. In other parts of Spain they said that Barcelona did not know there was a war on. It has since learned it. While I was there I saw the city from the air, and then I realized what a terribly exposed target it was, for the bombings it has had since. It lies on a flat plain, in between the sea and the mountains, and it seems impossible to miss it. One can easily understand how dreadfully it has been bombed by the rebels in the past few weeks.

There was no point in trying to stay, for the anarchists had been suppressed by the communists, and there were rumors about the possibility of a separate peace being made by the government of Catalonia with the rebels. These rumors were hotly denied by the authorities, and one would

be surprised, if Catalonia really imagined, she could make separate terms with the Fascist rebels.

From there I went to Valencia by train, and it was one of the most uncomfortable train journeys I ever made. There was only one train a day, and we were crowded like herrings in a barrel. Something like the underground in rush hour, and we had neither food nor drink. But at the same time there was no sign of disorder, anger or ill temper among the passengers. They took their discomforts philosophically and their behaviour was thoroughly decent and respectable.

Valencia was the capital at that time and I found the Government authorities were more than courteous and helpful. They could not do enough, to try to make one comfortable, and they showed me as much as they could. One thing that surprised me was the atmosphere of the streets, there was no violence or disorder. There was nothing at all in the way of disorder. The whole atmosphere was free from constraint or fear, no whispering or suspicion. People talked freely on any subjects they liked in public places, without any thought of who might be listening. It was absolutely different from what I had seen and felt in Moscow. There, there was an acute feeling of fear. That was the whole atmosphere of the place, but it was not so with the government of Spain.

Another point. I attended a conference of one of the war departments, at which one of the war Commissars—note the title—explained to us methods of propaganda employed by the government to induce desertion amongst the rebels. There was nothing particularly notable about his lecture, but he ended it by saying: "I do not know what you gentlemen are going to say or write about what you hear or see. It is for you to write as you please. We welcome any favorable publicity but we don't dictate to you." You may say that was policy but to me it was just common sense. As it turned out they had nothing to hide, and they showed us anything we wanted to see.

I was also very favorably impressed by the courtesy shown to me in the streets. One day I wanted to find a certain place and asked a policeman. He did not know but took me over to a building where there was a Spanish sentry

on duty and asked him. The sentry just handed his rifle over to the policeman and trotted off down the street to show me. That sort of thing, of course, is not done in the best armies but the intention was kind.

I drove up to Madrid with another British correspondent, and it took us seven hours to do the 250 miles. There is no railway running between Valencia and Madrid. The road was excellent, and very interesting to drive over. At fairly frequent intervals all along we saw wrecked cars, some of them burned out, and almost all of them with the bodies riddled with machine gun bullets. In their raids on the road trying to cut it off the rebel planes spare nothing, neither ambulances nor red cross nor anything else. Ambulances are frequently blown to bits, and that is another instance of the cruelties of this civil war.

We got to Madrid without difficulty, and the impressions we got made it hard to believe that the city had been in a state of seige for over a year. Street cars were running a full service, though there were no private automobiles owing to the shortage of gasoline. As one went further south in Madrid, however, signs of the siege became more frequent, and some sections had been pretty well demolished by bombing and shelling, but in spite of that if there was a house with even a semblance of a roof, you would find some family living there still. At certain corners we saw that the paving stones had been taken up and built into barricades. These barricades are extremely strong and the defenders seem determined that if Madrid is taken it will only be taken after fierce street fighting, and that will be a bloody and terrible struggle, for those barricades will take a lot of storming.

I went into the trenches at University City, and as soon as we got there we heard the rattle of rifle and machine gun fire within two or three hundred yards. It was not dangerous because of the deep communication trench. In the front line we were a few hundred yards from the rebel trenches around the university clinic building. They were excellent trenches, deep and strong, and the troops manning them seemed thoroughly at ease. There was no sign of them being jumpy or nervous. They seemed to be glad to see visitors and made it a point of courtesy to offer you a shot at the Fascists, with a machine gun, if you like.

The fascists are hanging on to a very dangerous salient which the government says it can take any time it likes, but as it is very strongly defended they just don't bother to take it. Even in this area there were some houses still undestroyed, and on going up to the top storey one could look across to the Guardarrama Mountains on the other side of the river and see the rebel batteries shelling the City. It was an intensely dramatic looking view of a battlefield. Another spot where one could get a good vantage point was the Telephone Building of about fourteen storeys which is entirely in military hands now. It had been hit 118 times by shells. The figure was accurate, for they had kept very careful records. The elevators were running and we went up to the twelfth floor, and there from a gallery we saw all around the fighting area. It is a building of immense strength, and though some of the floors are completely wrecked, they have kept their system working throughout it all. The system is automatic and there are 50,000 telephones working. The girls are all down in the basement, where they cannot be hit.

Looking down on the street the city looked very peaceful, but suddenly there was a scream and a crash. A shell had fallen *and left fourteen dead*. It was the only shell that was fired at the city that day, but one may arrive at any moment of the day or night.

The arrival of the first shell causes a curious effect in the city. Life in that particular area just stops. Children are called in, and the older people walk quietly to the nearest substantial shelter. Everything stops, for about ten minutes or so, and then, when nothing else happens, the children begin to come out again. The older people follow and life goes on as before, but they never know when death may fall amongst them.

At night the city is very quiet, and from my hotel room I could hear the fire of machine guns, and the boom of the heavier guns round the city. It is to that grim lullaby that the people of Madrid have been going to sleep for more than a year, never knowing if they will wake, or be the victims of a crash that means the arrival of a shell and death to an indefinite number.

The religious question was rather a problem. The priests negotiated with the government to reopen the churches in Loyalist Spain. The government said that though they might agree to reopen them they could not guarantee that the services would not be interrupted. They would offer no promise that anarchists would not attend in the guise of worshippers, mark down the devout, and murder them when they came out.

I am not going to try to suggest to you what is going to be the end of all this—I have not the faintest idea, but at the moment, it looks as if the Government were being beaten. My impression is that without foreign interference the Government could hold its own. That may be wrong, but I certainly think that if foreign intervention continues, the Government will be beaten. As to which form of Government would be the least objectionable to the people of Spain, it is hard to determine, one can only say that the whole thing is a dreadful tragedy in a land, that has known many tragedies, and it is not easy to say what will be the final outcome.

Perhaps, however I may say this of the impression that has been left by the general condition of Europe. One can hardly see that condition—one can hardly look over the world and remember Ethiopia, China, Spain, Austria, and now Lithuania, without a feeling of intense and bitter resentment. All the dreams that the world dreamt, twenty years ago, have been shattered to atoms, violence is still the arbiter, and everything we hoped for, in the way of peaceful settlements between nations, has been swept away.

One last comment that I would like to make is this: Twenty years ago we, who had the honor to belong to the fighting forces of the Empire, gave to our statesmen victory and peace, and in twenty years, in a welter of futile babbling, they have thrown victory away, and allowed peace to be destroyed.