

THE FACE OF SPAIN, *Gerald Brenan, Pellegrini & Cudahy*, New York, 1951, 310 pp. \$3.75.

Reviewed by Lidia Alkalay

Gerald Brenan, a writer for the authoritative and sedate Manchester Guardian, has written a revolutionary book. It is a first-rate report of a trip to Spain made by the writer and his wife, who revisited places they had seen during the Civil War, and homes they had lived in for a few years before it. But it is not the Brenans who are talking. It is the people of Spain, mostly the poor or middle-class poor (since they are the most numerous), who are the spokesmen. Occasionally we hear from the social climber, or an admirer of Franco, or a still well-off monarchist. An honest reporter, Mr. Brenan does not put theories disguised as conversation into the mouths of the men and women who populate the book. Rather, it is evident that the Spanish people, as well as Mr. Brenan, are aware that the real problem—in Spain and elsewhere—is the fact that land does not belong to the people.

Listen to this conversation: "We began to talk of the conditions on the land. 'They are not good,' my fellow traveler said. 'It's the old, old story—the landowners won't pay a living wage. We do all we can to press them in the syndicates, but they refuse to budge. Yet they are some of the richest people in the country. Look at Espejo, for example. The whole town and all the country around it are owned by the Duchess of Osuna, yet the workers on her estates are starving. The Reds ought to have shot those people.' I told him that at Malaga, where I had been living when the Civil War began, the Reds had not shot the landlords, but only the industrialists and the small people. 'That's just it,' he said, very excited. 'The Reds didn't shoot the right people. They left the landowners alone, and now we have to pay the price for it.'"

Or this: "The land has never been so well cultivated before, yet half the population is starving."

"Beyond that hill the whole country for leagues around is covered with evergreen oaks. We used to go there when we were short of food and pick the acorns to make them into gachas (porridge) or else bread. But if anyone goes there today the Civil Guard beats him and drives him off. The acorns are kept for the pigs." (Shades of Thomas Spence!)

And so it goes—from Madrid to the hill towns of Andalusia, to Malaga, Granada, Cordova and the rest of them—through passages which make the beauty and pride of Spain glow in full colors, through descriptions of history and art, of beautiful girls and dignified matrons. A never ending thread are the poverty and hunger, injustice, and the ravages of a war fought in vain.

Mr. Brenan knows what it is all about. At the end of his book, returning home to England and talking of his own people, he writes, "Our peasantry and artisans once had a culture, as have those of all the European nations. They knew how to cook, to eat, to converse, and to enjoy their leisure. But by the destruction of our countryside through the Enclosure Acts and the driving of its inhabitants into the slums of the industrial towns, this culture was torn up and they were reduced to a rootless, amorphous and disease-ridden mass."

The Face of Spain is a book to own. It is also a book to lend to those friends who cannot see below the surface of events.