

The last teachers of the English exile 10/07/2018.

(Translated by Gerald Hoare and Carmen Kilner)

This brief account is a response to a general invitation made some time ago by "EuskalKultura.com" to remember and recognize our fellow citizens who had to go into exile, thus paying a final tribute to the people who had to go into exile and lived or died in the diaspora as we continue to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the great evacuations abroad.

After the uprising of General Franco in 1936 and referring to the English exile, it can be said that there were several health problems and deaths during the Basque children's stay in England, especially in the early days, between 1937-1938, some eight children died, as well as two adults in the service of the colonies. As can be seen in "Save the children!" (Gregorio Arrien, Fundación Sabino Arana, 2014), their deaths occurred due to different causes and circumstances. In March 1938, José Sobrino Riaño, 15 years old, died. Much emotion surrounded his death and he was immortalised when, in London, the poet Luis Cernuda dedicated some verses full of feeling of pain, entitled "Elegy to a dead boy in England."

The death, on July 26, 1937, of the teacher Encarnación Velasco Mendizabal, as a consequence of a heart attack, was less felt. Born in Bilbao, she was just 35 years old. Her funeral was a great event, being buried in Eastleigh Cemetery, Hants. Her body was embalmed and placed inside three coffins, so that it could be transported later to Euskadi.

But we are not going to limit ourselves to the deaths produced prematurely. On the contrary, and in clear contrast with the previous two, our intention is to show that in exile there have been and there are people who have reached a remarkable longevity and have enjoyed a long life, despite certain difficult times. We can say that the teacher M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Larrucea Bustinza is a good example of this, since she died in mid-2016, at 99 years of age: Surely she is one of the last teachers who accompanied the children evacuated abroad.

Enlisted as a voluntary companion in the English children's expedition, M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Larrucea and the expedition members left on May 21, 1937, from the port of Santurtzi (Bizkaia), towards Southampton. On this expedition on board "Habana" there travelled 3,861 children and more than 200 women-young teachers and assistants, in addition fifteen priests and several nurses and doctors.

Once on English soil, the organizers distributed the children by groups to different colonies (a hundred in all), distributed throughout the country. Larrucea, along with an auxiliary, became the head of the colony known as the Carlisle Home, one of the eight houses that the Congregation of the Distinguished Sisters of Nazareth put at the service of the Basque refugees. There lived about 14 boys and 11 girls. Judging by the letters that the teacher sent to her superiors, she was very satisfied with the children, who worked hard and were well behaved: "In the morning, when they got up, they all met in a class and prayed giving thanks to God, some praying

in Basque and again when they went to bed. In her opinion, the children were very happy and the nuns were too."

As in the other colonies, between 1937 and 1940, Carlisle's home was emptied of children, leaving about 500 boys and girls in England. With the return home of the minors the teachers were left without a job and practically on the streets. This situation is spoken at length in the aforementioned work.

As a result, some of the women returned to Euskadi, and others remained living in Great Britain, employed in different quite humble occupations, working as housemaids, in factories, hospitals, etc. In these circumstances, some of them prepared to re-emigrate to America.

When, in 1942, the Basque residents of England set out to create the two entities of Euzko Etxea and the Euzko Emakumiak Asociación ( Basque Women's Association), the most active, responsible and engaged people, as was the case of M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Larrucea, signed up to act in both institutions, created without distinction of political, social or religious views. A few years before, the Spanish and Catalan refugees had formed their respective social, cultural and political organizations.

There were not many associated Basque women, about 50 in total (most of them former teachers and assistants), but, nevertheless, they did a commendable job, especially in relation to the educational situation of the children and young people who had remained in England and in the situation of soldiers, the sick and refugees in general.

The women's association created an institution of assistance to the Basques, not only to those who were in Britain, but also to the refugees who lived in France under very difficult circumstances.

The 'asociacions' remained active until approximately 1947. When the organizations are dissolved, it is not easy to know the paths that their members followed; a few Basques, both men and women, remained in England, while many went to France, to emigrate from there to Venezuela or to other Latin American countries.

As regards M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Larrucea, it seems that her final destination was the United States, where she lived until her death. She died in Fort Worth, Texas, on July 30, 2016, when she was barely a few months away from turning 100 years old.