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CHAPTER 67

THE SECOND PART OF OUR VACATION: SPAIN.

We could not get a direct plane to Spain. On the flight there we had to stop for a few hours in Rome, where we stayed at the airport, and continued then to Madrid. We stayed there at the Hotel Fenix, which was not far from the center of the city.

One of the first visits was to the Prado Museum, where we spent a few hours, enjoying one of the most exciting art collections of the world. We were in Madrid all the time on the go, as there was very much to be seen. The next day, we went on a tour to the Royal Palace, where we were shown great many rooms, overwhelming by their magnitude and the splendour of the contents. The Royal Palace has over 2000 rooms and we were shown only a few of the most grandiose and important ones, all of them richly decorated with works of art, paintings, and wonderful tapestries.

The afternoons we used for strolling in the city, in the José Antonio Avenue and for shopping. Next, there was an excursion to the Valle de los Caídos (Valley of the dead) in memory of the dead of the Civil War. There is an enormous cross over the entrance, which can be seen from far away. There was before an elevator going up to the horizontal part of the cross, which could be entered by visitors, but it is not in use anymore, as it is not safe. Over the entrance is a pieta, a beautiful work of art, and to reach the entrance, one has to walk over very many wide stairs, leading into an enormous cathedral, the biggest in the world. It was hewn into a mountain of solid granite, hundreds of yards deep and hundreds of yards high, with 3 altars



at the end and the walls decorated with beautiful mosaics. It is a memorial for the dead of both sides, the royalists as well as the socialists, and it took many years to build it. It is a complete granite cave and there is only one small area, where water sometimes gets inside, and astonishing wonder of architecture. We visited on that tour also the Escorial, which was a monastery, later used as a royal palace and mausoleum. On the next day we went to Toledo, to see the El Greco House and the El Greco Museum, for which Toledo is mostly known to tourists, although it is an important Spanish city in many other respects. It was once the capital of Spain, was a center of the Moorish, Spanish, and Jewish cultures. Two former synagogues can still be seen there. In many churches paintings by El Greco can be seen and one of them, the church of Santo Tomé contains the famous painting 'Burial of the Conde de Orgaz'. The city is surrounded on three sides by the Tagus River and its chief landmark, high up on a hill, is the Alcazar, which was badly destroyed in the Civil War, when it was under siege for ^{over} two months, the defenders finally relieved by Franco's forces. When we saw the Alcazar, it was restored to its former beauty. One day we spent for a tour to Aranjuez, to the south of Madrid, to see a palace, a former royal residence, and the fine garden along the Tagus River. We went for a second time to the Prado Museum, since we could not see everything when we were there the first time.

Next we went by plane to Seville, where we rented a car. It is a major city and port for ocean-going boats. We visited there the cathedral with Columbus' tomb, containing great many treasures, the Alcazar, the Giralda tower, the Court of the Oranges, and the old city, saw the house, where Rossini once lived

and where he composed the 'Barber of Seville'. We visited there also a former patient of mine, a Mr. Rodriguez and his wife, and spent one evening together in a fine restaurant at the bank of the Guadalquivir River.

We then went on a tour of Southern Spain, first to Cordoba, where we visited first the cathedral, which was before a mosque, La Mezquita, famous for the more than thousand marble columns, an astonishing experience. Not far from there is the house, where Moses Maimonides was born and there stands his statue and next to it is a Jewish temple, consisting of one large room with a large inscription in Hebrew letters, high up near the ceiling. We also went through a section, called 'La Juderia' with very narrow streets and many beautiful patios with great many flower-pots, nicely arranged, houses where once the Jews lived, before the Inquisition of 1492, when the Jews had to choose between baptism and emigration.

Then we drove on and our next stop was in Granada, where we stayed in a beautiful hotel, high up near the Alhambra, from where we had a beautiful view of the city and the Sierra Nevada. Granada was originally a Moorish fortress. The concentration of Moorish civilization in Granada gave the city great splendor and made it a center of commerce, industry, art, and science. It ended with the conquest of Southern Spain by Ferdinand V. and Isabella I. in 1492, and the Moors lost their last hold in Spain. The Alhambra was the ancient Moorish citadel and royal palace.

Before visiting the Alhambra, we were taken to the Palacio del Generalife, summer residence of the Moorish kings with celebrated gardens, from where we had a good view of the Alhambra. Then came the visit to the Alhambra itself, and we finally saw

the Fountain of the Lions, which we had seen in our history books in high school. The Alhambra is a true expression of the once flourishing Moorish civilization and is the finest example of its architecture in Spain. The building consists of many halls and chambers surrounding the Court of Lions, containing arcades, resting on 124 white marble columns. The building has magnificent examples of the so-called honeycomb and stalactite vaulting; its walls and ceilings are decorated with geometric ornaments of great minuteness and intricacy, executed in marble and alabaster, and glazed tile. There was much destruction after the expulsion of the Moors, but the structures were extensively restored after 1828.

We stayed in Granada 4 days, as there was much to see there. We visited also the cathedral, where there are the tombs of Ferdinand and Isabella, and we made a tour into the Sierra Nevada, where we saw snow again, after many months. We went up to the highest point we could drive to and had then to climb up to the top, from where we had a beautiful view of a great part of the Sierra Nevada. We were on the Veleta, 11,246 feet high. The highest mountain in the Sierra Nevada is the Mulhacen, 11,421 feet high, and we could see it close by. Quite a number of people were there, enjoying the view, although a strong wind was blowing. Right there I caught a number of butterflies, nothing spectacular, some very dark and quite large Satyrs, great many Vanessa xanthomegas, which we called in German 'Kleiner Fuchs', many Pieris protodice, which we called in German 'Schachbrett' (Chessboard), and many blues and other little ones. It was nice to walk and run about high up there on the alpine meadows, which reminded me of the Austrian Alps. I met, by the way, a

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young boy there, about 12 years old, who was also out for butterflies, with a net and all kinds of other equipment. He spoke French and ^I could not have a real conversation with him, but he showed me what he had caught. Now back to Granada.

The next day, we left early, went straight south to the Mediterranean Sea, driving through mountainous areas. There were many fruit stands along the road, where oranges were offered for very little money, wonderful, juicy ones. We reached the Mediterranean Sea at Motril, went then along the shore to the West, passing through small villages, beautiful to look at from far away, as they all were high up on hills, the houses close together. In the late afternoon, we reached Malaga, but since Hedy was sleeping, I went straight through to our destination, Torremolinos. We stayed there in a beautiful hotel, had planned to stay there for 4 days for a good rest. We went only once to the beach, but did not enjoy it very much, as there were too many people there. Once we went again to Malaga, since Hedy had not seen it yet. I ate there cheese, which made me sick for a few days. Once we went for an evening stroll to the center of Torremolinos, where there was an enormous crowd, promenading, window-shopping, eating Frankfurters, Hamburgers, and what have you at the many stands. Almost all the people were young and, as we could find out, mostly Skandinavians.

When the four days were over, we continued our tour, going west, passing through Marbella. Our destination was now Algeciras. We could not go to Gibraltar, since the road was closed for many years. Franco had demanded, many years back, the cession of Gibraltar by England, which had won Gibraltar in 1713, ceded by Spain in the Treaty of Utrecht. As England did not consent,

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Franco ordered the closing of the road, a measure, which did not affect England very much. I think that the road is now open again. From Algeciras we could see Gibraltar across a little bay. To go to Gibraltar, one would have had to take a boat to Marocco and go from there to Gibraltar, and to come back to Spain, go from Gibraltar again to Marocco and from there to Algeciras. We preferred not to do that.

From Algeciras we went to Cadiz, through an area, where cork oaks grow, and we could see trees, from which parts of the bark had been cut out and also trucks, loaded with that bark. The cork oaks grow, as we were told, only there and in Portugal. Once we saw a great number of storks there on the ground. It was already the end of August, and that is the time, when the storks leave Europe to go to the South, and they stop usually in Spain on the way to Africa. It was a long time, since I had seen storks. When we were in Strasburgh in 1960, it was September, and we were shown there the empty stork nests on chimneys in small villages. Cadiz was interesting, and after a short stop for a meal, we continued our trip and went straight to Seville, where we had a reservation in the same hotel where we had stayed before.

The next day, we returned the car at the airport and took a plane to Madrid, where we stayed again in the Hotel Fenix. We went two more times to the Prado Museum, once also to the Museum of Modern Art, which has many Picassos, went many times for strolls, and after 2 or 3 days went to the airport for the trip home. It was high time, since we had run out of money, had not planned the financial part of the trip very well. These were three weeks of enrichment of our knowledge and great enjoyment.