



General View of Granada.

A WEEK IN THE SOUTH OF SPAIN.

BY MABEL LESLIE FENWICK.

MOST people who make a lengthy stay in Gibraltar are filled with a desire to visit Spain, and see for themselves those famous places about which so much has been written—such as Granada, Cordova, Ronda, etc.

My sister-in-law and I, having spent the winter on the Rock, determined to have a week at Granada before coming home; so one morning in the beginning of May we crossed the Bay in the small steamer to Algeçiras and there took the train to Ronda, our first stopping-place. We felt rather venturesome—two ladies starting off alone in a strange country, especially as some parts of Spain are not very civilised, and it is not customary for women there to go about much.

We had been having lessons in Spanish for some time, and had primed ourselves with various questions, such as “*Cuando sale el tren por Granada?*” (When does the train leave for Granada?) etc., etc. The railway from Algeçiras to Ronda has not been open very long, and was a very difficult line to make, on account

of the rocky and mountainous nature of the country.

Our train left Algeçiras about three o'clock on this warm, sunny afternoon in May, and at first went at a fair pace through level country and then through the cork woods, which are very pretty. There were not many passengers, and we had a very comfortable carriage to ourselves, and being provided with a tea-basket we were quite happy. We stopped at a good many little stations, and were always much amused at the country folk and fat old priests and the gendarmes in their picturesque costumes, the latter looking very imposing in their cocked hats, much adorned with silver lace, as is also their uniform.

Soon the aspect of the country changed, and we began to ascend; far below us on one side rushed the Guadiaro, a mountain torrent, and above us on the other side towered great rocks. The air was deliciously clear and light, and after the heat of Gibraltar we thought it most refreshing. The train now proceeded very slowly, and at times we seemed perilously

near the edge of the precipice. At last we stopped altogether, and our door was opened by a swarthy Spanish navvy, who intimated by vehement gestures that we were to get out. On looking out we saw that every one was leaving the train with baggage and walking to another train about fifty yards farther on, the line between being completely blocked by huge masses of stone. This sort of thing is constantly happening on the railway, as there are so many streams from the mountains which cause these landslips. We eventually reached Ronda about 8.30 p.m., by which time it was, of course, quite dark. We had written for rooms to the best, and, I think I may say, only hotel, so the porter was on the look-out for us, and we lost no time in getting into the very jolty omnibus and driving to the hotel. The latter was a primitive wooden building, but it seemed clean, which was a great point. Mine host, who spoke English with a strong American accent, conducted us to our rooms, small, bare apartments, looking out on to the stable yard. We then went down to the

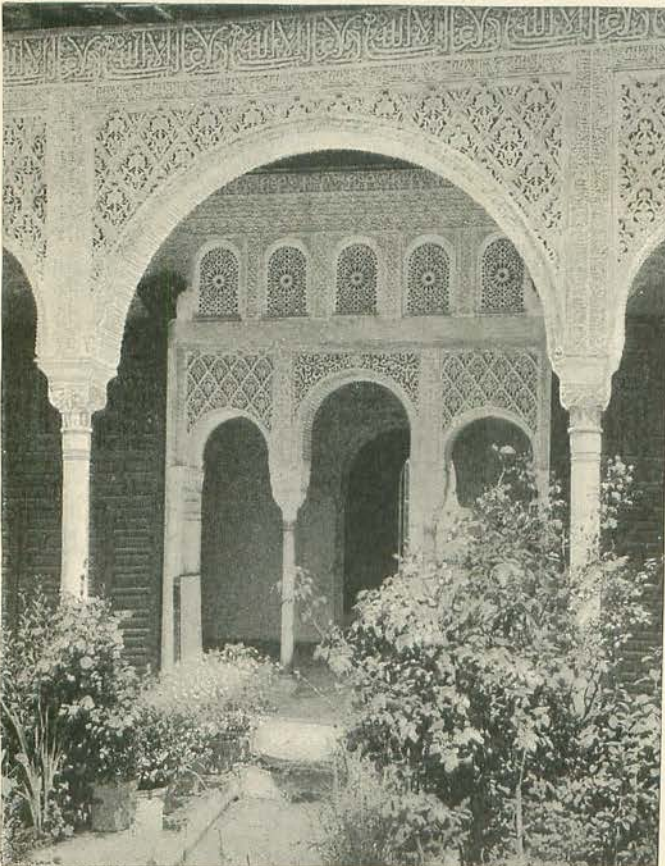
dining-room, likewise a bare room, and were very glad of dinner, which, though plain, was quite decently cooked.

The next day, Sunday, was a perfect spring day, the sun very hot, but the air was delicious; as Ronda is 2,500 feet above the level of the sea, my readers can imagine what it is like. We wandered through the quaint old town until we came to the "Tajo," a wonderful chasm spanned by an ancient bridge six hundred feet high, beneath which the Guadiaro at last bursts from its mountain recesses. The town is built on both sides of this ravine. The view from the Alameda is marvellous: there is a precipitous drop of a thousand feet, and there before one's eyes are green verdant valleys, dotted with farmhouses, and with streams flowing through them; then beyond, far away, are bare and frowning mountains; it is a view that one can gaze at for hours.

We were very unwilling to leave Ronda so soon, the air was so invigorating and the surroundings so beautiful; but not having much time at our disposal, we had arranged to go on

to Granada on Monday morning, and left by the first train, at seven o'clock. The country soon became level and uninteresting, and we were quite pleased to get to the big junction Bobadilla, where we had to change. Trains go from there to Malaga, Seville, Madrid, Cordova, etc., and having some time to wait for ours to Granada we amused ourselves by looking at the passengers, who were numerous. Here, as at the other stations, were women with large jars of water on their shoulders who walk down the platform calling out "Aqua fresca!" and very glad we were of some, the heat being great in the middle of the day. We finally reached Granada about five o'clock in the afternoon, and drove at once to the Hotel Washington Irving, which is situated just outside the Alhambra.

The latter stands on the brow of a hill overlooking the town, and the approach to it is through a beautiful

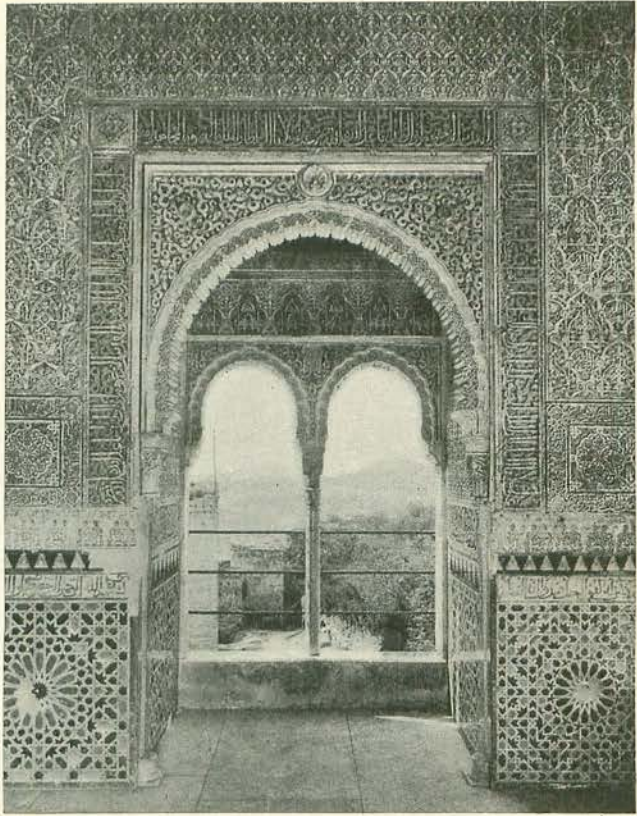


COURT OF THE AQUEDUCT, GENERALIFE.

avenue of elm-trees; on all sides are streams of running water and numerous fountains, relics of the Moors, who by means of pipes and channels obtained their precious liquid from the Sierra Nevadas. These stately snow-mountains form a most perfect background to the Alhambra, and, glistening in the sun against a cloudless sky, make a picture not easily forgotten.

The Hotel Washington Irving is a large one under very good management, much frequented by Americans and Germans. We set off early the day after our arrival to explore the Alhambra, and wandered round the outer wall for some time until we came to the entrance of the Courts—quite a small, unpretending door, near the imposing palace commenced but never finished by Charles V. On entering we found ourselves in a vast *patio*, or court, about one hundred and fifty feet long, paved with white marble and down the centre a huge tank full of water; this is called the Court of the Alberca, from the Arabic *al bierkah*, a pond or tank. From here we passed into the renowned Court of Lions; round the four sides are arcades of open filigree-work, supported by slender pillars of white marble, and very beautiful it is. It all looks so delicate and fragile that one marvels to think how long it has lasted, especially as most of the courts are roofless and so exposed to all weathers. A guide was taking round a party of sight-seers, but we preferred to wander off alone. Space does not permit of a detailed account of all the courts, and it is difficult to rightly express the peculiar charm of the place. Standing up high, as it does, the views on all sides are exquisite; looking through the graceful Moorish windows seems to enhance the beauty.

As we were returning to the hotel we met in the grounds a strange and picturesque individual, who offered us his photograph in an ingratiating manner, and informed us he was El Rey de los Gitanos (king of the gypsies). He wore a short brown velvet coat, with breeches of the same, a gaudy scarf, and a high peaked hat with many ribbons hanging from it.



WINDOW IN THE HALL OF AMBASSADORS.

He knew a few words of English, but we were rather pleased of a chance of airing our small stock of Spanish, and still more pleased to find he understood us. We purchased a photo for fifty centimes, and he escorted us towards the hotel, pointing out various places of interest. The next day we met our friendly gypsy king again, and as we were anxious to see the gypsies and where they lived, we inquired if he would take us to them, which he seemed very eager to do. He volunteered to get up some dancing, etc., for our entertainment, and arranged to meet us early that afternoon and conduct us to the place. Accordingly we met at the appointed time outside the Alhambra, and followed him through the grounds down to the town, across the river Darro, which flows at the foot of the hill, and up a narrow street of rather poor-looking houses. Stopping before one of these he, with many becks and smiles, invited us into a courtyard, and then up a stone staircase into a large bare room. Here were assembled about five gypsy girls and four men, two of the latter with guitars. They all greeted us in the most friendly manner and brought us chairs, which we placed near the door, both for coolness

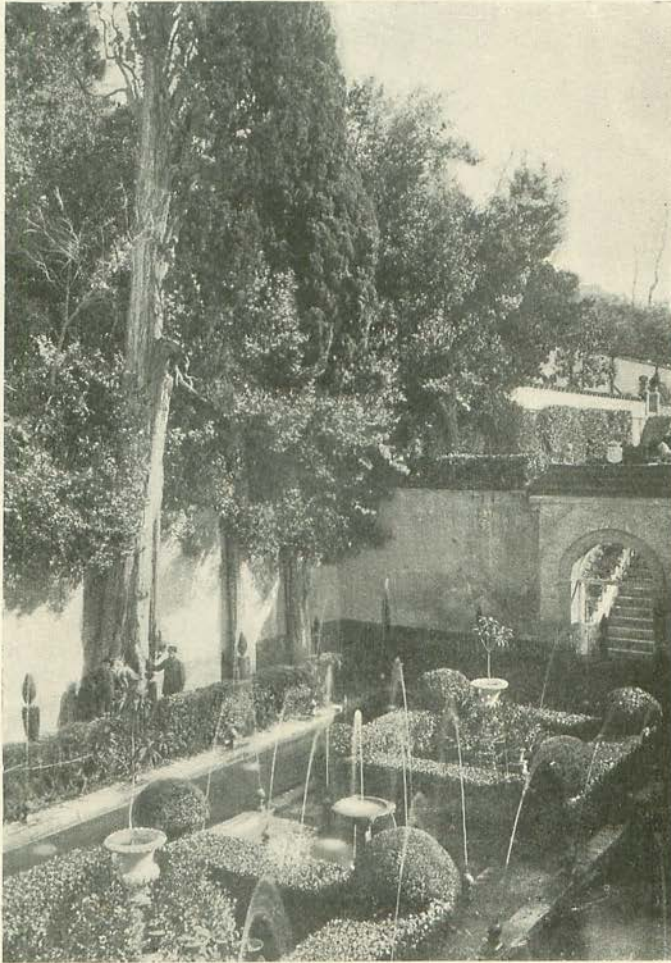
and also because we were not quite sure of our surroundings.

Another room opened out of this one, and the dancing took place there; two rather pretty girls performed first, accompanied by the guitars. The dance was unlike anything I had ever seen; I should say it was Oriental in character. The movements were very slow and not very graceful. Then one of the men danced a *cachucha* with a girl, the others beating time by clapping their hands. Then some white wine was handed round, and we were pressed to take some, but did not. We thought it time to leave, but our old friend would not hear of it, and tried to get us into the inner room; but we thought it wiser to remain near the door, and later we were very glad we had done so. After more dancing and singing of the same description we determined

to leave, so asked the old "king" how much the entertainment cost. To our great surprise he said twenty-five pesetas, which is about a pound. As we had only been entertained for half an hour we thought this rather excessive and told him so; at this he looked very angry, and the smiling and amiable faces of all the others also changed, and they crowded round us, holding out their hands demanding the money. We then began to

be rather alarmed, as we were entirely in their power, and I daresay had we had twenty-five pesetas with us we should have given it to them; but we had only a little loose money. This my sister-in-law with great presence of mind flung to the other end of the room; the gypsies rushed to pick it up, and we turned and ran as hard as we could down the stairs. To our horror the outer door was shut; but

after a violent wrench it opened, and we were in the street. Our relief at being once more in the daylight was intense, and though the old gypsy and one of the men soon followed us, we did not mind them so much out of the house. The old man talked and expostulated; but we said we should ask the hotel proprietor what sum we ought to pay, and that rather silenced him. They followed us to the hotel, but did not come very near, and we learnt



THE FOUNTAINS OF THE GENERALIFE.

on consulting the hotel authorities that the old gypsy was well known as a fraud, and that he had no right to demand such a sum. However, we were advised to give him some more pesetas, so that he should not annoy us in the future; at the same time we were warned not to have any more dealings with the gypsies, as they are very treacherous, and we were considered very lucky to get off as we did. We were amused to find that the gendarme



GARDEN OF SINDARAXA.

who is generally about the hotel kept his eye on us for the rest of the day.

We had no more exciting episodes during our stay in Granada, which came to an end only too quickly. The weather was exquisite all the time, and we went every day to the Alhambra, and always found fresh places of interest. We visited the beautiful gardens of the Generalife, the summer palace of the Moors, which stands still higher than the Alhambra; here are orange- and lemon-trees,

myrtles, roses, heliotrope, and many other fragrant Southern flowers; here, too, is the famous cypress walk which tradition has connected with the name of Boabdil. I shall never forget the nightingales which we heard all round us, even in the hotel gardens—such exquisite notes!

At last we had to leave, however, and accomplished our journey back to Gibraltar safely, though we had again to turn out of the train on account of another landslip.

