

THE LOST RESORTS:

3. KARLSBAD

By JOSEPH WECHSBERG

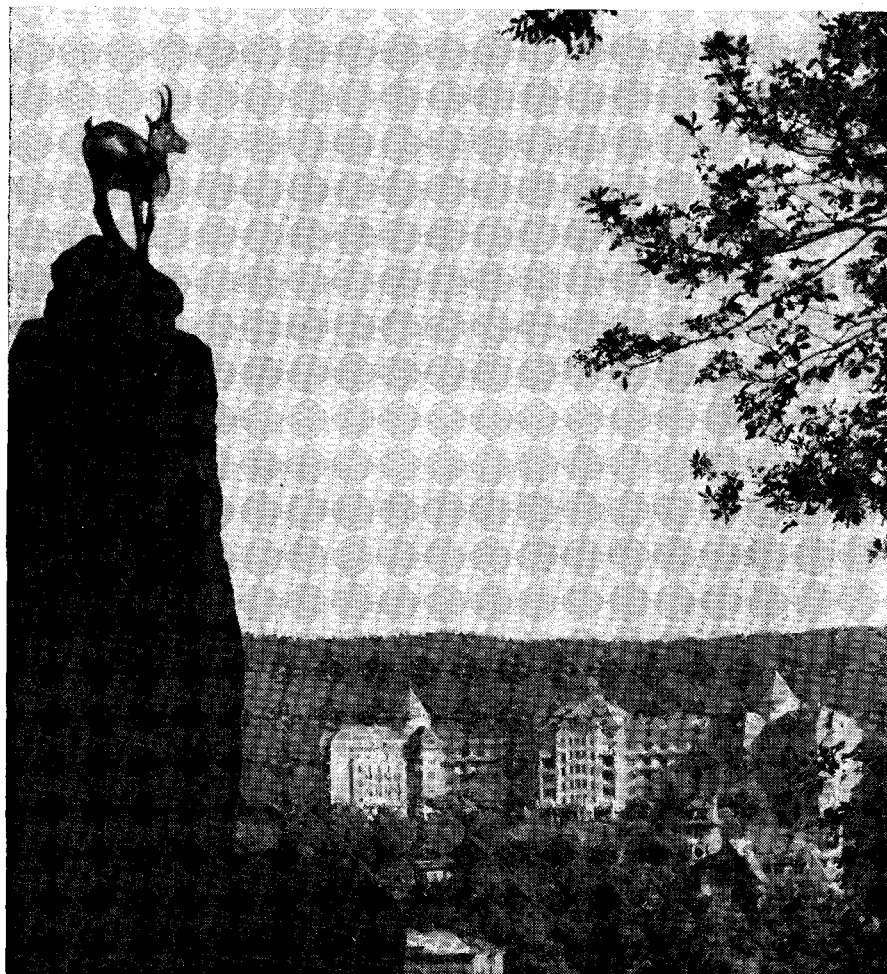
IN the early 1920s Uncle Leo invited me to come with him to Karlsbad, the famous Bohemian spa now officially known as Karlovy Vary—then and now the mecca of those who have lived well but not too wisely. I was a healthy, hungry teen-ager and had no idea what was meant by “afflictions of the liver and gall bladder, diabetes, inflammation of the kidneys, etc.,” all of which were said to be miraculously cured in Karlsbad. I know more about them today.

Uncle Leo was my Zionist uncle, not to be confused with the other uncles in my hometown in Moravia—the viola-playing uncle, the millionaire-banker uncle who got bankrupt, the uncle who was *always* bankrupt, the uncle from the cavalry, the uncle with the high blood pressure, and so on. It was a big family.

Uncle Leo said he was going to Karlsbad to attend the Zionist World Congress; he took me along as a reward for my activities on behalf of the Zionist youth movement in our town. I was very excited and prepared myself for the journey, in the fashion of Goethe (an old Karlsbad hand), by reading all the available literature, including Baedeker's *Austria-Hungary*. It had been published in 1913. Only a little over ten years ago, but in our part of the world guidebooks matured faster than wines. Our Baedeker informed me that Karlsbad, in 1913, had 17,500 “German” inhabitants (probably they meant “German-speaking”) and over 71,000 patients taking the cure.

I could well believe it when we arrived there and I saw nothing but *Kurgaste*, “cure guests.” Uncle Leo had reserved rooms at the Grand Hotel Pupp, the memory of which will bring tears to the eyes of former Russian grand-dukes, later employed as doormen in Montmartre, and of English lords, now showing their ancestral manor houses to tourists for two-and-six. Things have changed, and not only in Karlsbad.

Baedeker had listed the Pupp as the leading Karlsbad hotel, and they were right, as always. The Pupp was a real



Pre-Communist Karlsbad—“You get up at half past five and walk to the Sprudel pavilion and line up for your pint of these damned Glauber's salt waters.”

palace with spacious corridors and wonderful waiters who guessed your wishes before you uttered them. Admittedly I was also attracted by the Imperial that stood on a hill overlooking the spa, and had not one but *two* private cable railways, imagine! But all comparisons became meaningless after my first *Wiener Schnitzel* in Pupp's restaurant. It was enormous. Its well-breaded sides hung down over the large, gold-rimmed plate like a silk eiderdown over a luxurious bed. I'm no longer permitted to touch a *Schnitzel* but the memory of Pupp's, and even its taste, is unforgettably after all these intervening years.

The food was wonderful at Pupp's. That seemed very strange because most guests were forbidden to eat very much of it. Uncle Leo explained to me that the ritual of the Karlsbad cure was not to be taken lightly.

“You get up at half past five in the morning and walk down to the Sprudel pavilion, and you line up for your pint of these damned Glauber's salt waters,” he said, with feeling. “Then you walk through the woods to one of the cafés. What for, I don't know. Breakfast is a cup of unsweetened tea and two biscuits. You walk back all the way. Lunch is a strict diet. These people here are

PALM SPRINGS:

The New Karlsbad

By HORACE SUTTON

experts in making appetizing dishes containing no fat, no albumen, no starch, no nothing. In the late afternoon you go to the Mühlbrunnen and drink more waters. Then you walk again. The doctor tells you to dance at the Sanssouci, but who wants to dance on an empty stomach? A very light dinner and early to bed." He sighed. "I'll start tomorrow morning."

"Aren't you going to the Zionist Congress?" I asked.

"Of course, we're going. But I'm also taking the waters."

I began to understand why the leaders of world Zionism had chosen the spa for their congress. After enjoying too many portions of Polish carp and paprika chicken, gefüllte fish and another fateful piece of goose liver, they came here to do something for their soul (Zionism) and body (the waters). The next morning I accompanied Uncle Leo to the Sprudel, as the hot geyser was called. It was very impressive, shooting up over 2,000 liters of water a minute (according to Baedeker), and the temperature was 73 Centigrade. Baedeker had also informed me that the Sprudel had been discovered by Charles IV, Holy Roman emperor and King of Moravia—our Moravia!—one day in 1347 when he was deer hunting, but the Karlsbaders took a dim view of this legend. Personally I like Charles IV, who founded Prague University, my *alma mater*, one year after the alleged deer hunt, and that's no legend.

Uncle Leo bought me one of the special cups, with a painted sign "Souvenir from Karlsbad" and a handle made of porcelain straw, and I queued up with him in the Sprudel pavilion for our ration of waters: a salty, noxious-tasting liquid. People walked around, sipping it as if it were vintage claret. Most looked as if they had eaten too many rich sauces too often for the past eleven months, and were now trying to get in shape during the twelfth month for another eleven months of good eating. Uncle Leo pointed out several great Zionist leaders to me. I understood. Con-

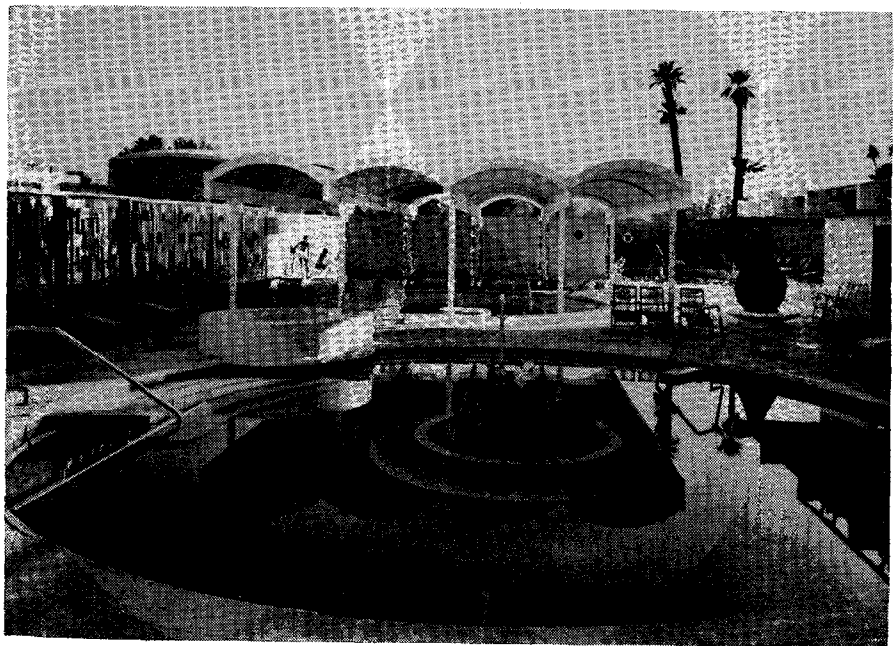
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ASIDE FROM the few cane-carrying convalescents who lingered in a corner of the lobby, there was little of the *Kurhaus* look about the Palm Springs Spa the night I checked in there recently. With its bright, methodically decorated, almost flashy, super-motel (motel is a word that is totally *non grata* in Palm Springs) air, it looked about as much like the old spas of Baden-Baden, Badgastein, Karlsbad, or even Saratoga as the Avenue Foch resembles the Strip in Las Vegas. The piano that tinkled out of the pitch-black bar sent the tune of the moment faintly through the corridors like a glass broken in a room down a distant hall. "Hello, Dolly, well, hello, Dolly, it's so nice to have you back where you belong. . . ." Palm Springs' well-stocked selection of divorcees drifted through the corridors seeking conversation and a friend. In the dining salon, inevitably called the Agua Room, the diners were working on chicken in the pot with matzoh balls, roast prime ribs of beef with Yorkshire pudding, and a

rolling cart of splendid pastries. Pounds gained in the evening could be steamed off the next day.

The good spa life is only one of the many ways one can mend or recreate in Palm Springs, which, to the residents of California and to many from the rest of the country, does for the body and the soul what the old watering spots were so well acknowledged to do for the wealthy who sought them in their salad days of the nineteenth century. One can, of course, ride in the desert, play tennis at the social Tennis Club or the Hollywoodsy Racquet Club, play golf at one of the eighteen courses sprinkled over the dry valley floor like green oases in the Sahara, swish in the heated waters of one of the 3,350 swimming pools that puddle a town with a population of 18,200, or watch the stars at work or play. Besides those who come to lounge at their weekend homes or at the hotels, there are also Gene Autry, who operates two hotels, Jack Benny, George Burns, Burt Lancaster, Groucho Marx, and Fred Waring, all of whom grow citrus, Lind-

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Palm Springs Spa—One can also "ride in the desert, play tennis at the Racquet Club, play golf at eighteen courses, swish in one of the 3,350 pools."