

CHAPTER VII

“Main Street” and Fashion Street—The Automobile Center of the Universe—Palms and Palmists—Barn Yard Golf, Mr. Bryan’s Bible Class and the National Trust of Wire Tappers.

“Main Street” in Miami is Flagler Street, which stretches its “Great White Way” from Elser’s Pier at the edge of Biscayne Bay to the farthest subdivision west, though it is neither great nor white as far as the street stretches, as the lighting system which they call the “Great White Way” in Miami does not extend that far.

The “open season” for tourists in Florida is December to May, but the season in Miami does not open formally until about January 1, at which time the big, exclusive hotels remove the iron barricades



THE AUTOMOBILE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE



A GARDEN OF PALMS

THE TOWN THAT CLIMATE BUILT

that have fortified their "grand entrance" during the long tropical summer. The informal season, however, opens about December 1, with the arrival of the first "snow birds" from the North. The season reaches its dizzy height during the month of February, at which time the local cash registers are thrown into high and space in the big hostelrys is at a premium.

When the season reaches high tide, Flagler Street resembles a fashionable midway. Gaily dressed women and sport-clad men promenade the palmy thoroughfare. "Main Street" becomes Fashion Street. The shop windows reflect the newest and latest modes, for here the spring fashions are said to have their first showing. The street showing, however, is the main attraction.

Detroit is generally credited with being the automobile center of the universe. This will be disputed by anyone who has been in Miami at the height of the season. The place at that time looks like a huge automobile assembling plant or the park-

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way of a famous speedway. No one has ever been able to tell how many automobiles there are in Miami. It is an endless chain of motors, of every make and manufacture, from the aristocratic Rolls-Royce to the lowly "Rolls-Ruff." Parking space in the loop district is second only in desirability to an ocean-front lot and traffic regulations are a lurking peril to the motoring tourist. The latest down town innovation is to park them on the roof.

"Main Street" in Miami is one of the busiest little streets in the world. It scintillates with life and bustle—particularly bustle. Everybody moves—or gets run over. The streets and walks are narrow and the crossings are a hazard like unto Broadway. The shops and stores present a busy scene of commercial rivalry. A number of the smart shops of New York maintain branch stores in Miami to better serve their fashionable clientele. The haberdashers display straw hats for men at one hundred dollars per, while the shops for women exhibit fashionable lingerie of "lavender and old lace" that

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dazzle the eyes of milady. Itinerant hawkers of cheap wares are also numerous. The gullible tourist is offered everything from a cure-all spark plug to the familiar hot-dog sandwich. Elser's Pier, lapping into Biscayne Bay, at the end of the street, is a cheap pocket edition of Coney Island, where unstable merchants and concessionaires of ancient games ply their trade. Fortune tellers are numerous. Madame Coco de Tapioca, an "Egyptian princess" (from Des Moines, Iowa), will tell by a reading of the palm whether one's investment in Miami real estate will prove profitable or not, while an Atlantic City astrologer will forecast one's fate from the signs of the zodiac. One of the busiest places on "Main Street" is the office of the Western Union Telegraph Company, which is larger than that in most Northern cities of a half-million population. It is always crowded with impatient people, who may be sending greetings from summerland—or wiring home for funds.

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Miami is a vertiable garden of palms. Palms of many varieties and varying beauty wave at one from every street and roadway. There are twenty-two distinct variations of the palm family in the Miami zone. In Royal Palm Park is a very beautiful grove of bearing cocoanut palms. Then there is the stately royal palm, the shaggy Washington palm, date palms, Kenitia palms, pineapple palms, and the numerous wild palmetto palms. As some unknown poet sings:

“The palms, they say, of Florida,
Unfold a sight bewitching;
A palm you meet at every street,
And every palm is itching.”

Royal Palm Park, bordering Biscayne Bay, is the recreational center of the city. Here are the band concerts afternoon and evening provided by the Chamber of Commerce for the entertainment of the visiting tourists. Here, also, are the “old timers”—the horseshoe pitchers—with their game of “barn yard golf.” The Horseshoe Club is an institution

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in Miami, like the real estate business, and the sport is one of the attractions of Royal Palm Park, where the links are always crowded. The club boasts a membership of over five hundred and includes on its roster the names of a number of millionaires. It is an affiliated unit of the National Horseshoe Club, and champions from many states visit the Miami links. The inter-city tournaments and the exhibition games of champions and near-champions are particularly attractive to the "fans"—and likewise annoying to the patrons of the afternoon band concerts in the same park. A champion produces thrills by pitching "ringers" while blindfolded or by filling the peg with many consecutive "collars." Checkers and dominoes are also indulged in at this open air club.

In Royal Palm Park on Sunday mornings of the tourist season gathers the famous Bible class of William J. Bryan, said to be the largest Sunday-school class in the world. Here Mr. Bryan, who ranks as Miami's most distinguished citizen, takes

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the opportunity occasionally to pay his respects to the "most altitudinous" of the higher critics in his crusade against Darwinism. Famous politically as a progressive notoriously unorthodox, Mr. Bryan takes his religion as a "stand patter." He strenuously objects to the evolutionists trying to make a monkey out of him. When it comes to "monkey business" Mr. Bryan usually plays a strong hand.

If, as a sun worshiper, you mingle with the crowd in Royal Palm Park and are approached by an affable stranger, the chances are that he is a harmless real estate agent, and not a "wire tapper." The "wire tappers" do not work in any such crude fashion. But if your Bradstreet rating is large enough to be a matter of public knowledge you may casually meet at some "exclusive" function a suave, mature "gentleman" of apparent culture and large means with an undue interest in your affairs. Then it will be time to watch your step.

The great influx of rich tourists who have time to kill offers a rich field in Florida for the confidence



W. J. BRYAN'S BIBLE CLASS IN ROYAL PALM PARK



WASHINGTON PALMS AND INDIAN BOYS

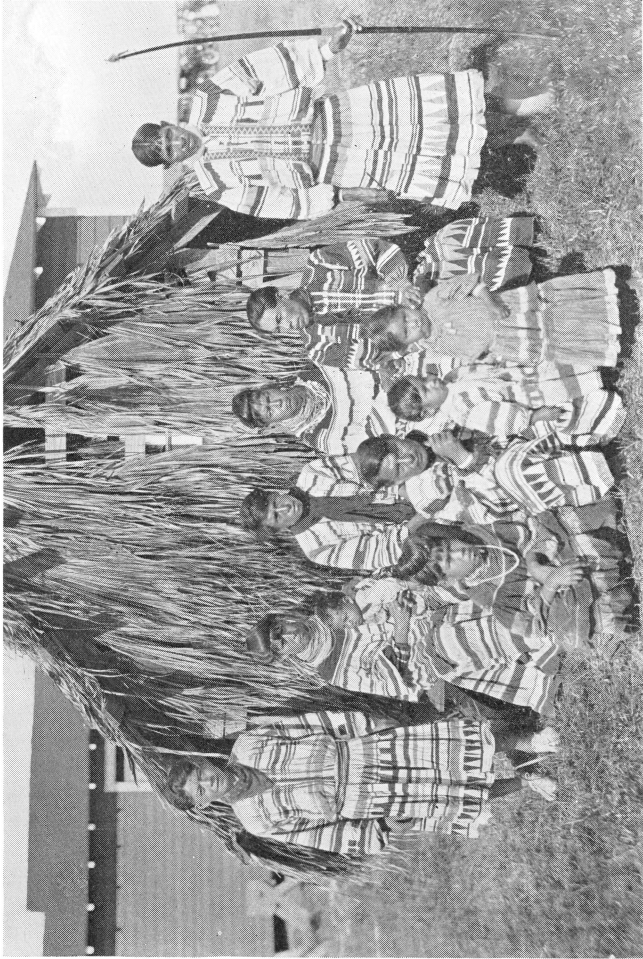
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man. A Miami newspaper is authority for the statement that the "wire tappers" took out of Miami in one season over a million dollars, and that in one week, when business was exceptionally good, their swag amounted to three hundred and forty-five thousand dollars. Other visitors also were thought to have been fleeced out of large sums, but the victims often refuse to make complaint to avoid the publicity and notoriety that would attend the apprehension of the slippers who fleeced them.

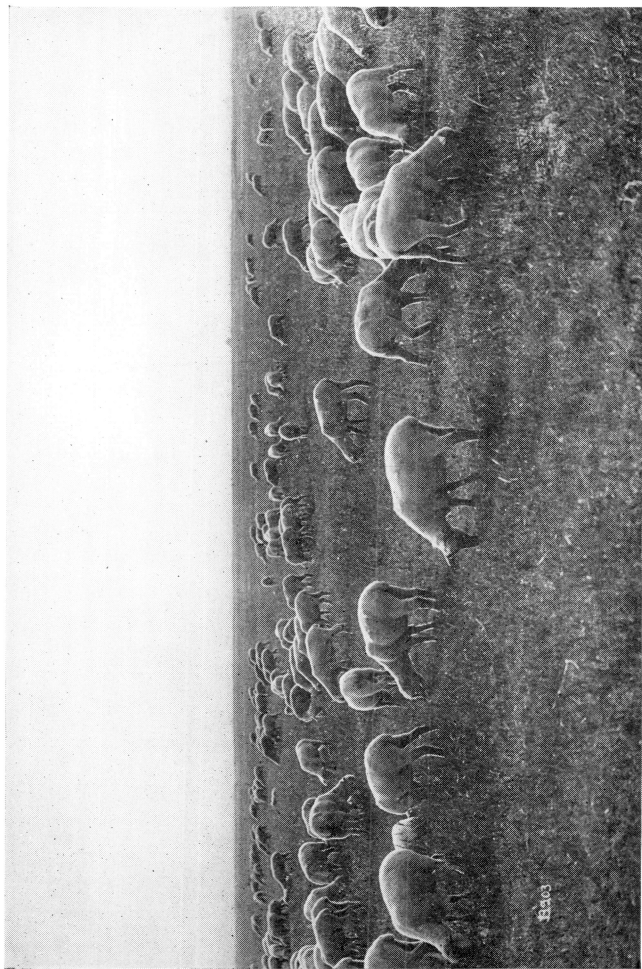
This newspaper avers that the National Trust of Wire Tappers has Miami as a site for one of its big "stores"—the place where they pull their phony stuff and fleece the unwary who hope to win enormous sums on inside tips about stocks, fake horse races and other forms of crooked sport. "Headquarters" selects the site of its "store," the man who is to head it, and marks the victims. Men in the trust work quietly in the home towns of the intended victims to get all the information possible about them, the names of their banks, their close business

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associates and everything that it is possible to learn regarding their private life and business affairs. They often corrupt public officials and make use of clever women in their operations. They are usually able to handle much of their money through the banks. One of the oldest men in the game, a man eighty-five years of age, active and keen as a hunting dog, is reported to have worked in Miami one season, but he is said to have found the competition of the local real estate men too much for even his talent.



SEMINOLE INDIAN VILLAGE



SHEEP RAISING IN THE EVERGLADES.