

CHAPTER XII

Miami Beach—The Isle of Pep—High Society and the American Riviera—Form and Formality—The Story of the Coconut Planters—A Modern Alladin and the Transformation of a Tropical Wilderness into a Garden of Beauty—Mecca of the Rich and the Famous.

“If Winter Comes” Newport and Fifth Avenue also comes—comes trooping down the palm-fringed East Coast of Florida to the American Riviera. By the unalterable decree of high society, Miami Beach and Palm Beach have been selected as the proper winter rendezvous of the smart set, and here the elect and the elite bask in the sunlight and the spot-

THE TOWN THAT CLIMATE BUILT

light, discuss the prevailing modes and arrange their divorce matters in anticipation of the spring marriages.

The list of the sojourners at these two resorts would make a veritable blue book and social register of "Who's Who" in polite society. Of course some nice people do go to California, but the Florida resorter does not like to hear California mentioned—except when they have a freeze out there.

With the successful establishment of Miami Beach as a popular resort, there began a spirited rivalry between Palm Beach and the new resort for the favor of the ultra-rich. If price be the criterion of "class," Miami Beach not only appears to be out-beaching Palm Beach but out-palming it as well. A club luncheon and a pitcher of lemonade served to a party of four at the casino for the elite called forth a check for fifty-two dollars. The customer, being from Milwaukee, thought the lemonade at this price should have been spiked, but he insists that it wasn't.

THE TOWN THAT CLIMATE BUILT

The two resorts do not have much of a muchness. Palm Beach is little more than a parade ground and style show. It is a great stickler for formality. Miami Beach goes in more for form rather than formality. At Palm Beach bouffant frocks, with ruffles and frills, are the established rule among the pretty habitués of the beach who never go near the water. At Miami Beach the popular Annette Kellerman or one-piece bathing suit is visible—barely visible, or visibly bare, one might say.

The difference between Palm Beach and Miami Beach is largely the difference between age and youth. Miami Beach might well be called the Isle of Pepsi. Sport is an epidemic there, and they go in for the strenuous life. Golf, polo and water sports are strongly featured. National yacht races are held annually on Biscayne Bay. On this course the fast racing boats of America have beat all records. There are three bathing casinos at the beach, and surf bathing may be indulged in the year round.

THE TOWN THAT CLIMATE BUILT

Night life in Miami and Miami Beach finds high society at numerous oriental gardens and smart social functions. Dinner parties and dress rehearsals are much in vogue. Hops are very popular. At one of the fashionable gardens moonlight dancing on a marble floor is the proper thing. A number of fashionable roadhouses masquerade under the more dignified title of tropical inn or tea garden. Some of these out-of-the-way resorts enjoy popularity chiefly for the ease with which boozetonic may be obtained.

Miami Beach insists on being a thing apart from Miami. It is a separate municipality. To the layman it appears that the interests of the two resort cities are mutual and there appears every reason for solidarity. The two cities are linked together by a giant, million-dollar causeway spanning Biscayne Bay. Miami Beach, like Miami, is riding on the high tide of a real estate boom. The entire island was offered at one time for twenty-five thousand dollars, which is just about the price today of a good ocean-front lot.

THE TOWN THAT CLIMATE BUILT

The little peninsula of Miami Beach was originally known as Ocean Beach. Along the small sand dunes is a skirt of cocoanut trees. The usual accepted story of the growth of these trees was that at some unknown time a schooner loaded with nuts in the hull was shipwrecked along the coast and that the nuts were washed ashore and took root. This plausible story was generally accepted as true, though now conceded to be pure fiction. The fact that the trees were growing in well-defined rows shattered the story of the wrecked schooner.

Early in the eighties there lived in Monmouth County, New Jersey, two young men who had heard of the old story of the great fortunes made by cocoanut planters. E. T. Field and Ezra Osborne dreamed of a fortune, and purchased from the government a large part of the ocean frontage from Jupiter to Cape Florida, paying therefor from seven-fifty cents to one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre. They were going to become cocoanut planters.

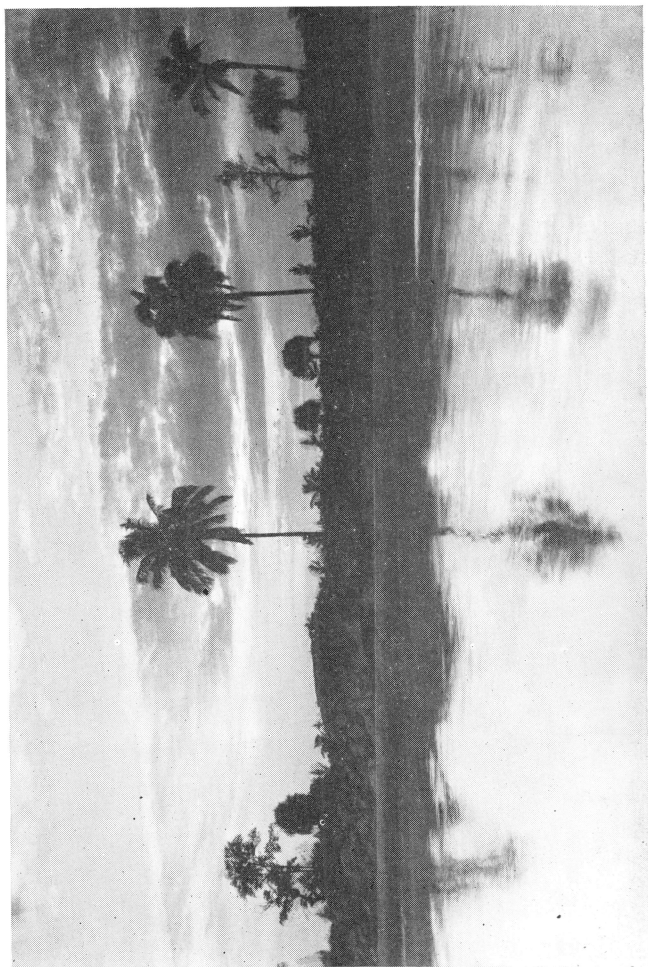
THE TOWN THAT CLIMATE BUILT

They had been told that no clearing of the land was necessary and that all they had to do was to plant the nuts. They figured that each tree would drop one mature nut each day and as they planned to plant four hundred and fifty thousand trees a great fortune loomed within their grasp. They secured a schooner and dispatched it to Trinidad to secure the nuts for planting. Men had to be brought from New Jersey to do the work. The nuts were scattered along the coast for convenient planting. It required three winters to complete the planting of the nuts. A large number of them sprouted, but a larger proportion of the trees were destroyed by rabbits that infested the beach.

John S. Collins, a leading horticulturist of New Jersey, also lived in Monmouth County, and Field and Osborne consulted Mr. Collins in regard to their venture, with the result that Mr. Collins was induced to purchase a half interest in these lands. After an investigation of the tropical section, Mr. Collins be-



THE COCOANUT PLANTERS



ON PANCOAST LAKE, MIAMI BEACH

THE TOWN THAT CLIMATE BUILT

came convinced that there were other lines of horticulture and agriculture more promising than the growing of cocoanuts. Mr. Collins then purchased the other half interest of these lands, which made him the owner of sixteen hundred and seventy acres of ocean front, extending from Jupiter to the Norris Cut, lying between the Ocean and Biscayne Bay and embracing four and one-half miles. A large portion of this land was covered with wild palmetto. Mr. Collins, being an expert farmer and an excellent judge of soils, was convinced that if the land could be cleared at a reasonable cost the growing of early vegetables would be a profitable investment. The clearing of the land by hand labor was found too expensive, and a traction engine was used for this purpose. Two hundred acres was laid out and planted in vegetables. As there was no way to get to Miami to deliver his product to the railroad, he dug a canal from Biscayne Bay to a small grasslake which connected with Indian Creek. This, however, proved

THE TOWN THAT CLIMATE BUILT

too slow, and in 1912 he built the Collins bridge connecting Miami and Miami Beach. Mr. Collins later planted two hundred acres in avocado and budded mangoes. His grove is the largest grove of avocados and mangoes in the world, embracing about nine thousand trees. This grove is a very profitable investment, the fruit selling as high as twenty-five dollars for a crate of three dozen.

The building of the Collins canal and the Collins bridge started the great work of development of Miami Beach. A company of Miami men was soon formed and a large tract of land purchased. A town site was laid out and extensive development planned, but the company did not make the success hoped for. Then along came a modern Alladin in the person of Mr. Carl G. Fisher, an Indianapolis millionaire, who purchased a large tract of land and began at once extensive development of the beach. Under the magic touch of his genius, the tropical wilderness was quickly transformed into a garden of beauty. He

THE TOWN THAT CLIMATE BUILT

reclaimed about one thousand acres of land, filling in the mangrove swamp with sand and muck from the bay. A town site was laid out, hard surface streets built and shade trees planted. Millions of dollars has since been poured into this development work, and the beach today is the Mecca for wealthy America. In 1920 Mr. Fisher completed his Flamingo hotel and since then other large hotels have been erected. Here, also, is one of the greatest aquariums in the world, established by Mr. James A. Allison, of Indianapolis.

The vast expenditure of wealth at Miami Beach has made the "wilderness blossom like a rose," and today the little peninsula is the playground for the pleasure loving, with magnificent estates for the great and near-great, the polo and golfing center of America, with flower-bordered canals, palm boulevards and wave-washed islands.