

CHAPTER XII
OF ALLIGATORS, FLAMINGOES, AND
HURRICANES

I

JANUARY drew towards its end. Again and again I had to remind myself that this was not midsummer and that I was not enjoying a 'heat-wave' such as in England makes the newspapers begin to publish comparative statements. Letters from England reminded me of all that I had escaped from. If only I could have sent, along with the boxes of fruit I despatched, boxes of Florida sunshine. Here there was almost too much, so that one morning when there was a heavy shower I went out, and walked in it, to enjoy the fresh scents brought forth and the enhanced sweetness of the air. With what solicitude my host and chauffeur ran after me with umbrella, mackintosh, and automobile! I would get wet, they declared, catching me up, as I briskly walked towards the yacht mooring. "But I want to get wet!" I declared, refusing to enter the car. "This rain's delightful!"

They stared at me, and then my host found the clue to this eccentric conduct.

"I suppose you feel homesick," he said, smiling.

"Well, no—but I'm just a little tired of being dry—variety is the spice of life," I answered.

So they left me to get wet like the mad Englishman they thought me.

Florida by now was full of visitors. The scene on the Beach and in Miami began to recall memories of the boom year. Yes, Florida was coming back, and when the *Duchess of Bedford* arrived in Miami Harbour, on a world cruise, there immediately appeared in the local press exhortations to the authorities to make Miami Harbour capable of accommodating the largest liners. There seems no reason why liners should not come direct from Europe, bearing those who wish to escape winter.

The excitement over the *Duchess of Bedford's* arrival was increased by the rumour that George Bernard Shaw was on board. Alas! he was, and the opportunity to play his rôle of jester before the Press proved irresistible, and, as ever, he contrived to make disparaging remarks upon America, and upon the country that all his long life has accorded him a home, fame, and fortune. Curious English people, who enjoy the rain and find amusement in being insulted!

II

One morning in February there was impressed upon me anew the miracle of radio transmission, surely the greatest of all discoveries. The conquest of the air seemed inevitable from the beginning of man's development, but the conquest of the ether lay beyond vision until these late days of civilisation.

I had arisen about eight o'clock, with the glorious sunshine all around. Out of my window I looked on the green plumes of royal palms, on the feathery coconut trees, with their encased fruits hanging like footballs, on the silvery leaves of the eucalyptus and the thick foliage of the spread-

ing banyan. Below me shone the emerald rectangle of my host's swimming pool, set in a frame of green turf. Thus early, gorgeous butterflies were flitting from flower to flower, visiting the blue bells of the thurnbergia and the flame-like blossom of the *Bignonia venusta* that fell like fire over the pergola. The morning was noisy with birdsong. Loudest, for the moment, was the call of the scarlet Cardinal whose wings flashed as he dipped to the rockery cascade and disturbed the pompous fan-tailed doves, strutting, snow-white, against a screen of scarlet azaleas.

Across the lawn, in the aviary engulfed in vines and creeper, the cries of the Java sparrows, the parrot, and the masked love-bird with ringed eyes and iridescent plumage, a comedian among the budgerigars, competed with the shrill singing of the canaries in the patio aviary. But over all this birdsong there came the deafening, palpitating drone of another kind of a bird, an immense steel bird of flight that had arisen with its forty passengers from the Pan-American aerodrome on the Bay, a mile distant, and which was now winging its way south to the Caribbean.

I dressed slowly, enjoying the comfort with which one could proceed between bathroom and bedroom in the warm air. What should I wear, for already it was 75° Fahr., though the day would get scarcely hotter under the beneficent south-east wind that kept this coast temperate through the tropical day? A pair of white slacks, sandals, and vest were all I needed and most convenient for the swimming pool so enticing at every hour.

The dress question settled, I descended the staircase from the gallery to the patio, its roof shaded with palm leaves laid across the netting which defeated the summer mosquitoes. Through the open side I looked on to the blaze of

flowers and foliage that enclosed this paradise of Nature. My breakfast, as usual, was set on a small table where I could hear the cool tinkle of water flowing down the rockery, mingled with the cooing of the doves, and the intermittent voices of birds in the aviary.

I had just seated myself, greeted by the smile of the neat little coloured maid, when my host came into the patio.

"I didn't want to call you earlier, but we're listening to the funeral service of King George—do come into the drawing-room," he said. And in order that I might miss nothing of this service being transmitted across the Atlantic my breakfast table was carried into the drawing-room, where the family was gathered. And thus the miracle happened. In the drawing-room of a house in Florida, with sunshine and birdsong all about me, I heard, as distinctly as if I had been present at St. George's Chapel, Windsor, only a few miles from my English country home, the measured tramp of men, the sad skirl of the pipes playing their lament, the low murmur of a great concourse of mourners, the sound of feet mounting the steps, the swelling of the solemn music from the organ within the chapel, and the piercing voices of the choir filling the air with the prefatory anthem.

And here we were, an Englishman and five Americans, at half-past eight on a sunny June-like morning, in a house buried deep in the coconut groves of southern Florida, listening to the burial of a King.

Since American time is five hours behind English time I had missed the first part of the procession which had wound its way through the streets of London to the station. The commentator informed us that it had been raining, but now, as the cortege approached the Castle gateway at Windsor, the sun had broken through.

Not a detail of the service seemed to be missed by us, sitting in the sunny room, the solemn music of this funeral pageant broken softly by the singing of birds in the garden. At one time only, the whole proceedings were blotted out by the temporary roar of another giant hydroplane rising on its flight to Jamaica, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Uruguay.

The drone died away, again the voice from St. George's Chapel flowed into our still room. It was the voice of the Archbishop of Canterbury, resonant, full-toned, "For as much as it hath pleased Almighty God in his wise providence. . . earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust . . ." And then, a little later, came the heart-stirring loveliness of blended choir, organ, and congregation singing "Abide with me."

The service ended, a voice broke in on the grief that we had shared with mourners over 3,000 miles distant; it was an American voice, telling us that we had just heard the funeral service of George the Fifth, Britain's king-emperor. For a few moments we sat there, in the flesh in a Florida room, in spirit in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. And then, the common day breaking in upon us, we were acutely aware of the miracle of which we had partaken. It had an awareness for me, an Englishman, that had a solemn significance. The radio had shattered the sundering power of space, and grief for a revered King had united two great nations in the hour of mourning.

A little later, in the garden, there was an incident as singular as it was eloquent. The negro gardener was at work, and, remembering that he had proudly claimed British nationality, I asked him if he had heard the broadcast from England. "Yes, suh," he answered, "we were all up at four

o'clock to hear it. It was a great service, suh. Ah was mighty proud."

For the next few days, after the widespread American tributes, I found myself wondering whether the legend of history should not be re-written. One of our Georges had lost America, and another George seemed to have won it back again, for all flags were at half-mast, and throughout the United States churches were crowded for memorial services. The character of our lost King had won this general mourning among the people of America, a spontaneous, sincerely felt grief, but it had been reserved for radio transmission to enable the members of the two English-speaking nations to walk side by side through the streets of London and up the Castle hill to that royal chapel in Windsor, which many millions across the Atlantic had never seen. There, through this miracle of the radio, they had unforgettably taken part in the majestic rites of a beloved King's funeral.

III

"This afternoon," said my host a few days later, "we will go to the show at the Biltmore Pool. There's a variety entertainment, and a fellow's going to attempt to ride an alligator round the pool. Here's an account of it."

He passed me the morning paper.

"Riding a twelve-foot alligator around the Biltmore Pool is the novel stunt arranged to thrill the audience at next Sunday's show. The 'jockey' who will attempt the feat will be Captain Earl Montgomery, holder of the world's record for remaining under water four minutes and thirty-two seconds. Montgomery, who has resuscitated from drowning two hundred and eighty-six persons in his ten years of lifeguard work, expressed the opinion that the alligator

couldn't be any more dangerous than some of the persons he grabbed as they were going down for the third time."

"I should like to see it—though I feel a little like a patron of a gladiatorial show," I said.

"One fellow lost a limb at the game some time ago, but I expect this fellow knows his job," answered my host.

"A doped alligator?" I asked.

"I don't think so—but you'll see."

We arrived at the Biltmore Pool, which is part of the de-luxe assets of the Miami Biltmore Hotel, and were conducted to our seats by girls dressed in the old West Point uniform, white trousers, blue-grey jackets, and plumed shakos. It was an astonishing scene. The Pool is L shaped. On one side there is a grandstand capable of holding a thousand spectators. All around the remaining sides there are loggias, with terraces over them which afford a good view. There were even spectators on the balconies of the high Giralda Tower. In all, grouped around that emerald pool, were some two thousand spectators, and with the coloured awnings, the rows of people in summer attire, the cream-coloured balconies and loggias, the high Giralda Tower, all in a glowing pattern of brilliant sunshine and shadow, the effect was as enchanting to the eye as it was novel.

Nor was this all. A level causeway ran across the centre of the upper pool. On this were stationed the lifeguards, a row of six bronzed men in canary-coloured slips, all magnificent specimens of manhood with their massive shoulders, muscled torsos and legs. They were skilfully placed, not for life-saving purposes, but as a masculine offset to the parade of feminine beauty that was to follow.

On a central platform abutting this causeway was an

orchestra, composed of students of Miami University, all in vivid uniforms, a Pageant Master's rostrum with microphone, and, in front, the open platform for the entertainment. To the right rose a high brick and stone diving tower, Italian in pattern with open arcades and a greasy pole projecting. To the right, built over one end of the pool, rose the scaffolding of the acrobats' apparatus, trapezes, tightropes, and wires; a fall meant a ducking.

At three o'clock, the pool rimmed with a crowded audience, the entertainment began. True to the publicity tradition of 'girlies,' there followed a long sequence of dress and undress parades. After the 'creations' had thrilled the feminine part of the audience, after mannequins had walked across the platform, to suitable music, the bathing belles, a hundred of them it seemed, gave the masculine part of the audience its thrill.

The standard of American beauty was always high: Here, set in sunshine, with golden limbs against a background of sparkling emerald water, these girls seemed surpassingly lovely. Doubtless they were 'chosen,' but what a lavish result was paraded before our eyes. Its frank appeal reminded me a little of the Babylonian slave market. These lilywhite, dusky, or golden bathing belles, with costumes attenuated to emphasise all that they perilously hid, feasted the eyes of the 'spanner and screw aristocracy,' who applauded 'exhibit' after 'exhibit,' which was judged by the volume it evoked. A stout gentleman near me who had well resisted the warmth of the afternoon perspired under the strain of frustrated desire. Happily a pool of water divided the houris from their adorers.

Miami having got on to its legs, and having proved not niggardly in quantity or quality, we passed from this ful-

filment of tradition to other forms of entertainment. There was a fancy-dress competition for children under twelve, who had to impersonate film stars. Their parade was varied in some cases by a variety turn, and tiny tots of five and six sang and jazzed before the microphone. Personally, I found this exhibition of infantile sophistication unpleasant, and thought a spanking more merited than applause, but the American nation has a livelier conception of childhood from that of Europe, and 'cuteness' in the perambulator is joyfully hailed as a harbinger of future success. You cannot surprise or excite American children, not if you are a European; they will regard your efforts with a quiet eye and a cool contempt. They got over all that long ago.

The prize went to 'Mae West,' aged seven, picture hat and bust complete, who swaggered up to the microphone and piped, "Come up and see me some time." But 'the house' was brought down by an infant of five, a little girl whose acrobatic contortions on the dance floor left one breathless. Once she gave her tiny head a terrific bang, but gallantly continued her performance with professional sangfroid. Has America no Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, or, perhaps more to the point, for the Prevention of Encouragement by Adults? Yet I must confess the indiarubber infant prodigy seemed to enjoy herself hugely.

There now followed displays of high diving, and greasy-pole acrobatics, but we all awaited the star turn. At last the pool was cleared, and into it was towed a floating platform some ten feet square. The lifeguards now carried in a long box, whose weight and strength told us it contained the alligator. Captain Montgomery was presented, a tough-looking fellow of about thirty-five. He wore only a swimming costume.

The lid of the box was raised, and with a paddle the somewhat reluctant alligator was levered out. His dull eyes surveyed his new surroundings, and then, finding water, he slithered in with a vicious flick of his tail. We watched his dark body glide through the lucent water, a sinister brute, twelve feet long.

All eyes now turned to the Captain. He paused a moment, dived, and swam towards his formidable adversary. Swimming deep, he rose from behind and seized the alligator's tail. In a flash the water was churned up and man and monster disappeared in a white foam. For a few minutes we watched breathlessly the obscure contest. Then, to our amazement, the Captain was on the back of the alligator, which rose to the surface. While the monster lashed out he crept up its back until near the fearful jaws. With a sudden lunge he seized the snout and held it tightly. The alligator was taken by surprise and helpless.

The floating platform was now pushed towards the Captain. He proceeded to wrestle with the alligator, one hand grimly gripping the snout, and, getting a 'half Nelson' by passing his free arm under a front leg and over the neck of the brute, he succeeded in levering it up on to the platform, where it lay, belly up, its long tail lashing wildly in an attempt to free itself. Despite its desperate struggle, the Captain, still holding the jaws tightly, succeeded in getting astride the alligator's head.

And now arrived the most astonishing moment of all. The Captain proceeded to hypnotise his prisoner by rubbing its belly. Slowly the monster went under, its eyes glazed and closed, its tail ceased to lash, its short legs fell limp. It was completely hypnotised, and to prove the fact the Captain opened wide the enormous jaws and exposed the cruel teeth.

Then, slipping from the platform, he made the mating call as he gained the water. At the third cry the alligator completely recovered consciousness, turned over and slid into the water. Again the Captain pursued and captured it. Holding it firmly by its snout, he slowly worked it towards the platform, where the long box was put ready. Deftly he levered the animal on to the platform, and lumbered it into the box. The lid closed sharply, the bars were shot across. We breathed again.

"Next Sunday," announced the man at the microphone, "the gallant Captain will go into the pool and wrestle with an eight-foot shark!"

But we could not think about next Sunday. We were limp with heat and excitement. So off we went to the Spanish patio, to watch the dancers on the terrace and to drink an iced cocktail in the shade of the palms, while the crimson Florida sunset flamed across land and sea.

IV

"To-day we'll go to the races at Hialeah Park," said my host, as we breakfasted in the patio.

It was only eight o'clock, I had had my swim in the pool, to the sound of pandemonium in the garden aviary. When I enquired the reason of this noise I was told the birds "just felt like it" that morning. The rose-breasted cockatoo, called Rosy Dawn, was in a temper over breakfast being late. The masked lovebird, exactly like a gollywog, who always lurked behind a post and played bo-peep when you looked at him, told Rosy Dawn not to make such a fuss, and there was a great scene in which the Nyasaland lovebirds, the Java sparrows and the canaries, all joined.

I knew exactly how they felt. There are mornings when

we all 'just feel like it,' and this morning the air was hot and humid. It was a morning for idling by the pool. We decided to go to the races after lunch. I was anxious to see the racecourse financed by Joseph E. Widener, the Philadelphia multi-millionaire. At Il Palmetto, his Palm Beach palace, he had entertained Queen Mary's brother, and other European royalties. In his Philadelphia home he has fourteen Rembrandts, on his racecourse at Hialeah Park he has three hundred flamingoes; and I think he is prouder of the flamingoes than of the Rembrandts.

One evening I was the guest-speaker of the Committee of One Hundred, Miami Beach's most influential club. It is the unofficial Senate of Miami. It has four hundred members, and on the night I was its guest it gave an anniversary dinner to six hundred guests at the Surf Club. The dinner began at half-past seven, and when I rose to speak it was a quarter-to-one in the morning. There had been sixteen speeches and the presentation of an automobile to the secretary, but the guests showed no sign of fatigue, not even when I had finished at half-past one!

After this we adjourned to the cocktail bar. My ten companions at this high table represented an astonishing cross-section of American life. Their fortunes probably totalled five hundred million dollars, and most of them had begun life with the proverbial ten cents. The doyen of the gathering was John Hays Hammond, who, at eighty-one, was almost a legendary figure. A great mining engineer, he had been an athlete, a 'Letter' man at Yale, a fellow-student and friend of President Taft, a golddigger who had prospected in California and Klondyke, and he had fought Apache Indians, Mexican outlaws, and South-Western 'bad men.'

He had then gone to South Africa and become the friend

and chief consulting engineer of Cecil Rhodes. He supported Rhodes's political ambitions, was in the Jameson Raid, which he had opposed, was arrested by the Boers, tried, and sentenced to death. While in gaol in Pretoria he heard the erection of the gallows on which he was to be hanged. His sentence aroused a storm in both Houses of Congress. They requested a pardon of Kruger. As a result, the death sentence was commuted to fifteen years' imprisonment, and he was released later, on payment of a fine of one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars.

After his experiences in South Africa, he practised in London, then returned to America to take a leading part in some of the largest mining and hydro-electric power and irrigation works in Mexico and the United States. He was a candidate for the Presidency, lost the vice-Presidency by a few votes, and became the Special Ambassador and representative at the Coronation of King George Fifth. Such, in brief, was part of the long life of this lively little old man of eighty-one, who insisted on helping me on with my coat at three o'clock in the morning.

The fellow-guest on my left was Joseph Widener, who had built the racecourse at Hialeah Park. It was from him I learned about the flamingoes which are such a feature of the place. In the centre of the track Widener had dug a large lake, and he conceived the idea of placing there a flock of flamingoes whose pink-tipped wings and beaks should add a note of exotic colour to the scene. The lake was dug and flooded. The flamingoes were brought from Cuba by aeroplane, trussed up in straw-like champagne bottles, with their long necks sticking out at one end, and their long legs at the other. Nineteen of these bright birds survived transportation—the twentieth died en route. They were unpacked

and put on the lake. Alas! they all rose at once, spread their great wings and, with necks outstretched, circled high, and flew back home to Cuba. That was in 1932. The next season Widener tried again, but this time he had the wings clipped of the hundred birds he imported, and they stayed. To-day there are three hundred of them on the lake.

At two o'clock we set out for Hialeah Park Racecourse, some four miles distant. Across the flat scrub land we went until we arrived at the Jockey Club entrance, an avenue of royal palms. A hole had been blasted in the rock for each of these giant palms. Every one of them had been transported and planted there. Twice, the hurricanes blew them down and they had to be re-erected. This regal driveway to the club house is flanked with green grass and oleander bushes.

In the immense parking-ground we left our car. "That's all right, I'll look after it, brother!" said the parking car attendant. We set off on foot until we came to the palm-girt paddock behind the grandstand. We climbed up to the terrace of the club house. We emerged, and I stood in silent amazement before the scene below me.

On the left there was a gigantic covered grandstand. In the enclosure a band played, but the real centre of interest was the course and its setting. In the oval of the course there was a long artificial lake with a palm island in the centre, and, standing in this lake, on long stork-like legs, were Widener's fragile tropical birds, in all the loveliness of their delicate pink plumage. Around the course, in order to throw horses and jockeys into relief, there had been planted a screen of dark-green pine trees, which, in turn, were pricked at intervals by towering palms. Turf, lake, island, palms, pines, and flamingoes, with overhead an azure

sky reflected in the bird-mirroring water, made an unforgettable scene.

I turned from the grandstand, with its twenty thousand spectators, to the starting post, and watched the jockeys as they went round the course to the noise of excited backers, while, on the edge of their lake island, or in the water itself, stood those graceful birds, imperturbable and statuesque amid the wild rush of horses and the mounting frenzy of the crowd.

Flamingoes are strange lovely birds at all times. Supercilious, tranquil, they possess something of the gregarious nature of the penguin. They stand about in flocks, sometimes spreading their coral-pink wings, or lowering their long necks and bent beaks to sift the animals or plants out of the lagoon mud. Their beaks are bent for a purpose; the flamingo is the only animal which normally feeds with its head upside down while its body is the right way up. But by turning its head upside down the bent beak can spoon out the matter on the floor of the shallow waters.

My first sight of flamingoes, years ago, had been at sunrise as I stood on the bridge of a steamer entering the Gulf of Tunis. There, when they rose to wheel over wide sands, and about the minarets and domes of African villages, they had seemed natural assets of the landscape. Never had I imagined that my next sight of flamingoes would be, of all places, in the centre of a race track in America. But in Florida one should never be surprised. After a few weeks I was prepared to see the Mayor proceed to the City Hall on a camel.

Hialeah Park is now the most flourishing winter race track in the United States. The crowd from Miami flocks to it, and the high society of Palm Beach comes down by train.

This once-dreary subdivision of Miami is now a source of revenue to the State, for the Miami Jockey Club, over which Joseph Widener presides, does fourteen million dollars in bets each season, and of this the State takes some half a million in tax. Since the gambling instinct is irrepressible, Florida profits by it. There is an unofficial casino at Palm Beach for the very rich, but the Miami crowd can lose its money in one of a dozen ways, at Hialeah Park, at the dog tracks, in surreptitious casinos, or in the legalised slot machines for poorer tourists.

Since income and inheritance taxes have been banished from Florida somebody must provide the revenue. The visitor comes to spend money, and whether he does it on the turf or surf is a matter of indifference to the Floridian, who only wants to be happy and see others happy also. Occasionally there is a raid when law breaking becomes too audacious, but Florida's *laissez-faire* is as remunerative as it is generous, for the State collects a million and a half dollars a year from gambling taxes.

v

"And of course you must see a hammock," said my indefatigable host. "There's the Matheson Hammock, but that's a public one. I'll take you to lunch with a friend of mine; he's got a private hammock that stretches for a couple of miles down to the shore."

I was beginning to know a little about Florida hammocks. They have nothing to do with the kind defined in the Oxford Dictionary. You must turn to the American *Webster*, which defines a hammock, other than a couch made of canvas or netting, as follows:

"Hammock. In the southern United States, especially in

Florida, an area characterised by hard-wood vegetation, the soil being of a greater depth and containing more humus than that of the flat woods or pinelands."

The previous evening I had been to a dance at the house of a man who had a private hammock. I saw nothing of it, for after dinner we danced out of doors on a circular marble floor, which had, inset, a musical stave with some notes, the significance of which I never learned. On one side of this open-air dance floor was a white cocktail bar, built to resemble, so it seemed in the moonlight, the deckhouse of a yacht. On the other side there was a long swimming pool with a marble surround. The water was a deep emerald. It reflected the full moon and the dramatic palm trees at each end, whose trunks seemed bent to the rhythm of the dance band playing by the diving platform. Never had I seen a pool so green, so pellucid. It vied with the bordering lawns of rye grass, and the only movement in it was of the reflections of the palm trees, which slightly stirred in the warm night wind.

My dance host's hammock was a cultivated one, with four hundred species of palms.

"To-day you'll see a wild hammock—the original thing," said my host. "It's Florida untouched."

We motored southwards for some miles and turned in at an estate marked by a water tower. I was not prepared for the *palazzo* into which I was ushered, with its winding iron staircase ascending from a great hall, its baronial fireplaces and the large colonnaded patio.

After an excellent lunch, in a temperature that made me long to doze in an ordinary hammock, I was taken out to see an extraordinary hammock. My host was a wiry, retired business man. It seemed to me, that afternoon, sleepy after

so good a lunch, and broiled in the sun, that we never should come to the journey's end.

I began with an immense admiration for my elderly host's lore about this Florida wilderness; I ended with an immense admiration for his astonishing physique. We walked along high embankments made of mud and rubble scooped out of side canals, through two miles of mangrove swamps. But for the bright running commentary of my host's daughter-in-law I might have sunk from sight in one of the oozy mangrove jungles where the alligators lurked.

We started out through the home garden, where my host knew the names and habits of a bewildering assortment of unusual plants. I stood in wonder before the impressive Traveller's Palm: an enormous green peacock's tail it seemed. It was a member of the banana family and came originally from Madagascar. Why Traveller's Palm? I asked. Because at the foot of each leaf stalk it stores drinking water for thirsty travellers.

I peered into the dense tangle of mangrove roots and began to understand the hardships and perils of pioneers who had hacked their way through these monotonous thickets. This octopus-like growth creeps on and on, stealthily and invincibly, putting out root after root along the muddy shore, collecting about it sand and leaves and sea refuse, ever extending and adding to its trackless domain of mud and twisted roots.

Here and there a channel had been cleared, where the alligator had been seen launching himself from the bank. A strange bird, fishing by a bank, attracted my attention. It was a cormorant. He watched us for a moment, button-eyed, and then took flight. Blue and white herons skimmed down the canals. The hot sun brought out an effluvia of

rotted wood and sea-wrack. The embankment wound on and on. Negroes with motor trucks passed by.

At immense expense my host was driving his mud road down through the mangrove jungle to the sea. There was nothing beautiful in this scene, only long muddy canals, mangroves rising from the ooze, the dusty whitening embankment baked under the sun, an odd tree breaking the level green-grey monotony of the bush; nothing else but the sky, brilliant and pitiless overhead. But I began to understand the fascination of subduing this No-man's-land, of making a conquest of the primitive soil and the fierce jungle.

Finally, we came to the shore, and stepped on to dazzling, white sand, with blue and emerald water spreading into the shining bay. It was a veritable Robinson Crusoe scene, with its wind-bent palm trees, its long shore of silver sand, its inlets and shallows where the waves thinned out in scintillating ripples. Here, too, the canoes of Indians had run their prows into the shelving beach. Had Man Friday suddenly appeared from behind the smooth trunk of a palm tree, I should have felt it was natural.

And here I found my host was making land, in the same manner that the creators of Miami Beach had made it. He had cleared the mangrove swamp and was now pumping sea mud on to the stumps. He was pumping out of the sea thousands of tons of sand and peat and laying a foundation. He was conquering the mangrove swamp yard by yard.

VI

On the homeward journey, following a winding canal through the hammock which he was preserving in its natural state, my host told me something about the hurricanes which the Florida resident must contest. They will beat into

utter ruin a garden or plantation that may have been the work of years of costly labour. After the September hurricane he had removed a hundred two-ton truckloads of debris. There had been a hundred and fifty mile an hour wind which brought down palm trees, stripped other trees and plants of all their leaves, and left the roads a tangled mess of branches, telegraph poles, and telephone wires. A neighbour had completely lost his boathouse. The force of the gale had carried on the wind a log of wood four inches thick and six feet long, and threw it like a javelin into a wall.

Those who have experienced a hurricane never forget it. The barometer falls rapidly, down and down, the sun disappears under grey clouds, the waters all around have a leaden glaze, there is a sinister silence, broken only by the noise of hammers fastening up storm shutters. The Weather Bureau keeps trace of the approaching hurricane, warning by radio the people to get off the roads and indoors. Then a roar fills the upper air, the trees begin to bend, the day grows dark, and the whole world is shaken by a tremendous hammering, the vicious shrieking of wind, the sound of branches and trees snapping, the collapse of buildings, the incessant pounding blows of wind and water.

The rain travels horizontally and beats through everything. Trees are torn up by the roots and flung about like sticks. Wooden floors and walls crack and bend and the water rushes in or is siphoned up by air suction. Sheets of corrugated iron, and tiles torn off roofs, are whirled through the air, murderous objects for anyone unfortunate enough to encounter them. Drinking water is cut off, as also gas and electricity. "When the Weather Bureau warned us we got all our food, light, and water prepared, ready for the siege," said my hostess, describing her experience. The wind

can blow a train off the line, or push in the sides of concrete buildings. If a building succeeds in withstanding the wind, a vacuum created by the sudden rush of air will tear out window frames and doors, and leave the building exposed to streams of water that curve through the air like blades of steel.

Down on the Keys, where the terror of the sea waves was added to the uproar, the wind-dazed people escaping from their collapsing houses lashed themselves to trees, and stood waist high in the seas swirling by them, menaced by loose planks and jetsam. Trees are bent in a bow by the wind, stripped of all leaves. Those inside their houses see the doors shake before a weight of water. Cement falls suddenly, cracked under pressure, and water boils up. A blackness settles over everything lit only by the rim of swirling water, and over all is the fiendish clamour of the storm.

The September hurricane gave its victims a false respite. It roared over Miami, passed, leaving a wreck-strewn city, and then, just as the inhabitants began to venture forth, the hurricane swung back again with increased violence. In the 1926 hurricane hundreds of yachts were torn from their moorings, sunk or swept up the Bay and left stranded inland. Miami has an aquarium on the edge of its boulevard. It is a ship which was swept up there by the hurricane and then left without any possibility of ever regaining the sea. It was converted into an aquarium as a solution of the problem of removal.

The hurricanes play the strangest tricks. One of them blew the Indian River out of its bed, leaving a sandy bottom ten feet down, revealing all the lost anchors and cables among the dead fish. They pile up walls of sand. After the September hurricane one Miami Beach hotel had to cart

away two hundred tons of sand from its ornamental garden and pool. Seashore residents discover that their boat-houses have disappeared, and, if they are lucky enough to find them intact, they may be a mile or two from their sites. I met a Floridian who, in the 1926 hurricane, had had his cottage moved across to the opposite side of the lawn, and a neighbour emerged to find two strange motor-boats settled on his tennis court.

The devastation is frightful. Six months after the September hurricane I could see everywhere evidence of something which had struck and battered Miami: a telegraph pole still leaned at an angle of forty-five degrees; a great live oak had been riven, and its broken branches strewed the ground; an ornamental garden, with elaborate pergolas and trellises, looked as if a giant had beaten it with a stick. Woe to the purchasers of jerry-built houses! Many of the purchasers in the boom period saw their roofs fly off like jampot covers. All over southern Florida I saw 'savaged' palm trees that looked like plucked birds, all their plumage gone, only the barren stump of a trunk left. And these trees were fortunate. Thousands of them lay on the ground.

But the human aspect of the hurricane is the most terrible. Down on the Keys, amid the jumble of smashed dwellings, strewn furniture, bedding, and clothes, there arose the unmistakable odour of rotting flesh. Men and women who had come through the nightmare were not concerned about their possessions; they were hunting for lost members of their families. Broken bridges and washed-out highways held back rescue work. Haggard-eyed little parties went searching for lost brothers, fathers, mothers, and children, finding them sometimes caught in a tangle of roots in mangrove swamps.

Yet, although Miami knows its sinister drawback is no longer a secret, for it is situated in the track of the hurricanes, Miami always believes the last one is the last. It recovers with incredible rapidity, benefiting in some cases, for the bad old buildings are swept away, and insurance finances better ones.

Nature, too, assists. Growth is so prodigious that soon the devastated earth is covered over again with thick vegetation. If you are tactless enough to press the matter with the Miamian, he will insist that hurricanes, if you know how to take them, are not too terrible, and, you should remember, they have one great merit, they never, never blow in the tourist season. From October to May the hurricane strictly respects the close season, while the visitors flock to spend their money in the sun.