

## CHAPTER XIV

### PARADISE, AT A PREMIUM

#### I

PALM BEACH owes its name, they say, to a cargo of coconuts washed ashore from a vessel wrecked there in 1879. It owes its existence as the millionaires' playground to Henry Flagler and his railway. His *Royal Poinciana Hotel* set the fashion. Wise administration and exclusiveness have made Palm Beach the resort of the smart set, the rich and the well-born. It abhors vulgarity. It vetoes orgies, side-shows, nudity, and advertisement. It would like never to be mentioned in the Press. It uses the sea-reach that divides it from the mainland as a deadener of the world's loud voice. It calls this reach a lake, which it is not, but when you cross the bridge from West Palm Beach you feel as if you had entered a heavily carpeted room. You lower your voice and lessen your pace. West Palm Beach belongs to the world. Palm Beach, across Lake Worth, belongs to the best people. The beach is private, from end to end, except for a public strip where you will bathe only with tradesmen, footmen, chauffeurs, cooks, and parlourmaids. You will see many automobiles, but they are scarcely heard. They all have the expensive purr of the Rolls-Royce, Packard, and Lincoln. Elsewhere in Florida the chauffeurs are invariably black, here they are exclusively white, and all of them are gloved. True, you can be driven

by a coloured man, but it will be in an 'afrimobile,' in other words, in a wide white cane chair mounted on three wheels. It holds two persons and is a kind of double-breasted bath-chair, rubber-tyred and silent, and propelled from behind by a coloured man in a white suit. It gives the appearance somewhat of a tricycle with a large baby basket in front.

The Eton-jacketed jazz-band met me, as before, on my arrival at West Palm Beach, where one descends in order to cross Lake Worth to the lido of languid millionaires. They sound the last note of levity that will be heard, for at Palm Beach life is serious, exclusive, and expensive. I suppose a man of moderate means can exist there, but he will feel like the man who can only afford a coffee at the Ritz. Palm Beach does not want you, nor your money. It has no desire to grow, it will not trouble to exploit you.

It is the City of Supreme Self-Satisfaction. And it has every right to its title, for it is a model of quietness, cleanliness, and beauty. I tried hard to find an ugly corner, an unpleasing vista. The small houses were as charming in their well-kept gardens as the great villas with an army of gardeners. Everywhere one looked on, or over, banks of flowers. The grocer lurked behind a façade of flaming hibiscus, the hairdresser lived under a pergola of lemon branches, and the newsagent was discovered in a bower of bougainvillæa. The whole place was a garden, with smooth asphalt roads winding down avenues of palms. Every street was a flower garden with tropical plants and shrubs. One never thought of picking a bloom, since at every step a bouquet met the eye.

Such were my first impressions as I drove through the

streets, after passing over the bridge between the dowager West Palm Beach, a little dowdy, and the débutante, Palm Beach, whose beauty ravished the heart at once. The place is a triumph of landscape gardening, with the blue ocean on one side, and the emerald Lake on the other serving to emphasise the floral beauty of this strip of land.

I had not been in Palm Beach an hour when I felt an overwhelming temptation to tear a leaf out of my pocket book and let it fall in the street. Would a dozen scavengers rush out from behind the palm trees, for not a square inch of paper could I find lying in any of the streets? Under the fierce sun not a flower wilted; nor a blade of grass, nor a parterre but seemed well-watered. A flawless, invisible service operated everywhere. Sign-boards, posters, advertisements of any kind simply did not exist, a miracle indeed in a land in which advertisement is nine-tenths of existence. When I wanted to buy a pocket handkerchief I hesitated in front of a building that looked like a Spanish *hacienda*, and discovered an outfitter, a jeweller, and a perfumist, all carrying on business in what seemed to be the courtyard of a grandee's house.

The smooth Rolls-Royce ceases to purr, the gloved chauffeur descends and opens the door, I am called out of my cushioned reverie. Is this Rome in which I set foot to earth? Bronze doors swing open, I pass through a hall banked high with flowers, across a black and white marble hall, with a fountain tinkling somewhere in a green recess and emerge into a loggia opening on a garden of massed palm trees, pines, bananas, and banks of Spanish yuccas. The roof of the loggia is of carved cedar wood, supported by twelve

Doric columns. The floor is paved with Pompeian tiles. On the back wall hang stone plaques, and under them, on scagliola plinths, there is a row of classical busts. An immense Roman sarcophagus holds a mass of orchids of a dozen pastel hues.

My hostess rises to meet me from a chaise-longue. She is a tall woman, as distinguished as her setting. Overcome by the scene as much as by the heat, I sink into the proffered chair. I swiftly reflect that dark Pittsburgh supports this shining magnificence. My host is a retired locksmith; all the best houses and banks in the United States carry his locks on their doors. We talk, and somewhere a parrot suddenly screams. Looking across the patio, in the centre of which a jet of water sends a diamond spray into a marble basin, I discover, high in one of the palms, an immense blue cockatoo who is free to flit from branch to branch.

In the evening there is a dinner-party. Twelve of us assemble in the loggia. It is dark and the palm trees seem immense, their heads lost in the sky, but underneath their branches there is a soft blue light, which also illumines their smooth trunks. Following the light to its source, I find the palm trees are flood-lit. There is a golden spotlight on the fountain.

We go in to dinner. The butler is a Swede, the footmen are French. I should not be surprised if a majordomo in scarlet livery walked into the room. The ladies are roped in pearls and sparkle with diamonds. The whole scene is a Palm Beach set-piece, and I feel quite unreal, like a spectator who has strayed on to the stage by mistake. I am amused to discover that the conversation, which is excellent, is chiefly of the economic crisis, and the fear of inflation sends a cold shiver down these naked and black-coated spines. The

country is going to the dogs. The end will be bankruptcy. Palm Beach laughs uneasily, apprehensive of a financial hurricane. Strange, but always amid luxury like this one hears a similar conversation. I had heard it, in the same terms, with the names of the principals changed, in London, Paris, Rome, Vienna, and Berlin.

My hostess fills me with admiration. She is *grande dame*, on the Paris model, and in all this lavishness there is no hint of vulgarity. She moves her guests round in the drawing-room with deftness, she is quick to detect mutual interests. The gentlemen, I fear, have lingered overlong in the loggia, discussing politics, finance, pictures, and old glass. I enjoy a long tête-à-tête with a famous neurologist who has made a lifelong study of criminals in the State prisons. He almost persuades me that we should never punish anybody for anything, so much are we automatons reacting to hereditary instincts.

Midnight arrives. There is a purring of cars at the door, a medley of voices and thanks, a putting on of furs and coats, a slamming of doors, and the soft crunch of departing cars on the gravel. For a few moments I linger in the starlit night. Down on the Lake shine the lights of yachts at their moorings. From somewhere the warm wind brings a delicious scent of unknown flowers. The palms rustle overhead, shutting out the stars; the house behind me with all its windows ablaze against a dense background of trees is like a drop-scene in the theatre. If a *prima donna* suddenly appeared on one of those balconies and burst into song, I should not be surprised. I should lurk like a Spanish conspirator among the scarlet cannas.

But the butler wishes to close the door. I go in. To-morrow I am to explore Palm Beach.

## II

For nine months of each year Palm Beach is dead, given over to caretakers, policemen, gardeners, and workmen who come over from West Palm Beach. Silence and heat reign over the shuttered hotels and closed villas. This is the time when roads must be repaired, drains laid, new buildings erected. By a municipal law all building activity must cease on December 15th. When December comes Palm Beach awaits the opening of its brief, brilliant season. Every tree has been pruned, every road swept spotless, every villa and hotel painted. No rubbish may be left on vacant plots, nor scaffolding be allowed to stand. The curtain rises on January 1st, and the stage is fully set.

There is not much room to be untidy on Palm Beach. In all its forty miles of length it is nowhere more than a mile broad. Some of the villas look on the ocean and the lake. The villas, breaking with American tradition, are mostly walled in. They are in many styles, West Indian, South Colonial, and Georgian. The Spanish style is also much favoured, a legacy of the reign of the amazing Addison Mizner. He was a Californian artist who had been a Klondyke miner, a painter in Samoa, and had fought in the Australian prize ring. Later, he had made a fortune as an architect, and was wondering what next to do as he lounged on the terrace of the *Royal Poinciana Hotel*, blasé and bored.

He talked there one day with Paris Singer, inheritor of a fortune from Isaac Singer, of sewing-machine fame, and they discovered a taste in common. They had a passion for Mediterranean architecture. Since one had money, one genius, and both were bored and looking for new worlds

to conquer, they decided to turn Palm Beach into a Mediterranean shore, architecturally.

Their first idea was an immense country club with dependencies for convalescent soldiers. Somehow the soldiers were forgotten, and the Everglades Club appeared—a Spanish castle, large, low, with concrete walls cleverly coloured to imitate old stone, and hollowed tiles. It created a sensation. It was exclusive and expensive, and became the social centre of Palm Beach society.

The Spanish craze swept the land. Everywhere houses with flat roofs, pantiles, terraced lawns and patios sprang up. They suited the climate, the clear atmosphere and brilliant sunshine. Addison Mizner found himself deluged with commissions to build homes for millionaires, the more fantastic and expensive, the better. The Vanderbilts, Sloanes, Biddles, Wanamakers, and Dodges, all the merchant princes, steel and motor magnates, besought Mizner to design them palaces along the golden shore. But Mizner, being a genius, was wayward. He would tear up a blue-print and fling it in a millionaire's face if that gentleman insisted on his Alcazar being practical to live in as well as marvellous to look at.

Mizner overlooked no detail. He made Roman plaques and benches, of cleverly moulded concrete, he made his own Spanish tiles, ironwork, columns, pottery, gates, all faithfully copied from Mediterranean models. By night and day he laboured, directing an army of builders and craftsmen, imported from all over the world. He changed the face of the pleasure coast, and while some of his work approaches freakishness, much of it reveals a sense of beauty and a great gift for lay-out and design.

At Boca Raton he built a country club that cost ten mil-

lion dollars. It arose from the end as if at the wave of a magician's wand. I knew an architect who travelled from London to Florida solely to look at this creation, and he told me that he considered every penny of his passage money well spent. "I imagine some millionaire came along to that fellow and said, 'Just play!' What fun he must have had!"

Yes, fun he had undoubtedly, but he died impoverished, leaving fifty million dollars' worth of architecture at Palm Beach as his memorial.

For many years the uncrowned queen of Palm Beach Society was Mrs. Edward T. Stotesbury. A younger woman now leads the fashion, but the Stotesbury reign will ever be regarded as the golden age. Mrs. Stotesbury and her husband still live in a Mizner palace, at El Mirasol, which Edward Stotesbury commissioned. It has twenty-five acres of the greenest lawns in Florida, thirty-seven guest rooms, garages for twenty cars, and there is a gardener to every acre of the estate. It cost a million dollars to build, and a hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year to maintain. That does not worry Mr. Stotesbury, who is a partner in the firm of J. P. Morgan. Every year his devoted wife gives him a birthday dinner-party, and in the year of my visit he played the kettle-drum and sang his favourite song—"The Old Family Toothbrush that Hangs in the Sink" to the guests.

Erect, dapper, and white moustached, he was full of fun at eighty-seven. This party was one of Mrs. Stotesbury's famous dozen dinner-parties which she gives every year to some twenty guests. To be invited is like being commanded to Court. Women have left Palm Beach broken-hearted because they failed in the assault of high-walled El Mirasol, hiding amid its noble palms.



## III

One of the most remarkable places in Palm Beach is nothing to look at. It is built of wood, discreet in its pattern, and looks over the placid waters of Lake Worth. My host and hostess took me there to lunch, and as we stepped inside I was a little astonished by a somewhat swift and personal questioning that I had to undergo. But in a few minutes nothing but smiles seemed to surround me, and my hand was warmly shaken.

"You are now a Life Member," said a gentleman, handing me a card and a small booklet.

I thanked him, a little dazed, but quite unaware what I was a life member of. Was it a dance cabaret? I saw no signs of dancing. My hat was taken away from me. Still mystified, but refraining from asking any questions, for it was obvious that a great honour had been accorded to me on the credentials of my host, I found myself seated at a table in a restaurant overlooking the Lake. Again I noticed that all the decorations were white and green. I also noticed that the simplicity which prevailed was of the expensive kind. The service was discreet and flawless, the menu that of a first-class French restaurant. We might have been lunching at the *Château d'Armenonville* in the Bois de Boulogne.

And, glancing around me, I knew this could not be a casual lunch place, for there, in a corner with a party, merry and most beautifully dressed, was the Duchess. My eye travelled around the table and soon discovered the little Countess, laughing into the face of a handsome cavalier. I felt very proud just then of my countrywomen. They were radiant and beautiful, and this time the Duchess rivalled her

chic friend. I felt that even Mr. Wellington-Solomon would have forgotten his anxiety over his stock of mourning crape could he have seen these two lovely women in all the beauty of their summery raiment.

I could withhold my question no longer.

"Where is this?" I asked.

"This," said my host, completely suppressing the astonishment he may have felt at my abysmal ignorance,—“this is Bradley’s.”

“Oh,” I said, quietly, and carried on with my langouste.

Bradley’s. That one word holds the history of Palm Beach. A little later in the afternoon I had a glimpse of Colonel E. R. Bradley, an old man, faultlessly groomed, wearing a stiff collar, and greeting everyone with a formal, easy courtesy. Looking at him, it was difficult to believe he was seventy-seven, had worked in steel mills, been a cowboy in Arizona and New Mexico, a miner, an Indian scout, a bookmaker, and an hotel keeper and was the possessor of one of the greatest racing stables in America. Out of these stables he had produced the winners of four Kentucky Derbys. All his life he has had only one passion—horses.

Years and years ago Colonel Bradley—in the United States you can become a colonel without ever seeing a camp, a State Governor can make colonels, for political services—opened a gambling saloon in Chicago; then, with his brother John, he moved to the centre of winter society at St. Augustine, where he opened a casino. When Flagler pushed his railway farther south and Society moved to Palm Beach, the Bradley brothers followed and opened their gambling saloon. Flagler, determined to keep Palm Beach exclusive and *sans reproche*, bitterly opposed them, and all the local millionaires followed suit.

That might have been the end of Bradley's, or The Beach Club, as it was called. It was about to close when a woman asked to try her luck at the tables, and Bradley's waived its rules. It marked the beginning of the club's rise to fame and prosperity. Women are desperate gamblers, and now they had found relief from the boredom of Palm Beach.

All this happened around 1898. There are strict laws in Florida against gambling, but Bradley's has successfully ignored them for nearly forty years, and has made Palm Beach the Monte Carlo of the United States.

To enter Bradley's you must be introduced, over twenty-four years of age, and a non-resident of Florida. It follows that you must have money to lose. In the boom days the play was high. The gambling chips were five and ten dollar tokens, they are now half a dollar. Once upon a time the casino made a profit of a million dollars a season, which enabled Colonel Bradley to own two local newspapers, spend thirty thousand dollars a month on his famous stables, and own a large share in Hialeah Park Racecourse. The casino paid even during the depression.

After lunch we wandered into the business end of The Beach Club, to give it its formal name. Everywhere the green and white motif of the decorations prevailed. They are also the Colonel's racing colours. Passing down a long corridor, we came to a circular room with a rotunda bearing Greek plaques. Around the room, silent, thick carpeted, were a number of roulette tables. The bright Florida day was screened out. One heard scarcely a sound save the clicking of the rolling ball. Women with the same intense expression one sees at Monte Carlo sat around the small tables. The croupiers had the same air of indifference.

Discretion is the better part of the croupier's calling. They

are well paid, well fed and housed. They have an allowance for tobacco, and a salary of thirty to fifty dollars a day. They remain bachelors, and silent. The whole place is as quiet as a church, each table draws its devotees as to a shrine. You are well watched and guarded. To go to the baccarat room you must pass a strong grille gate where a guard stands.

On these green baize tables vast fortunes have been lost and won. But Palm Beach has no suicides' cemetery. As at Monte Carlo, you will be assisted to leave with a railway ticket and food allowance if you have been reduced to beggary. Scandal never touches Bradley's.

I watched the devotees of the tables with the curiosity of one who has no gambling passion. I could not spend five minutes in this atmosphere without feeling it was an utter waste of money and time, the human drama apart. I was now a Life Member of Bradley's, where I had the right to come and ruin myself in exclusive company. But I was in no danger.

As I came away, and fingered my membership card, I reflected that if Bradley's and Monte Carlo depended on persons like myself, they would close their doors to-morrow, for I am as little interested in the rolling of a ball as I am in somebody's horse passing a winning post.

"We'll now go to the Bath and Tennis Club," said my hostess, as we left Bradley's. I would fain have slept. The afternoon was hot, the lunch had been too good. There was nothing more I wanted in this world save a pillow and silence. I swear the car, as it purred along the smooth asphalt, sang a lullaby. Desperately I kept an open eye and ear. There was so much I must see and listen to.

Ocean Boulevard follows the sea southwards to the Bath

and Tennis Club. On our right ran a row of lovely villas, with coloured awnings drawn against the sun. Over high walls, and through magnificent iron gates, I caught glimpses of pastel-hued villas asleep in the sun. Well-kept drives and avenues of palms led past parterres to stone terraces and pergolas that made the scene Sicilian. At one gate past which we drove stood two grim men. They were the private guards of a tooth-paste millionaire who was in fear of kidnapers.

Every one of these villas seemed to have an owner whose name was on something one bought every day. Here lived the man who made patent caps for milk bottles, there the merchant prince of sock suspenders, the king of the disinfectants, the princess of the ten-cent store, the master-mind of chewing gum, the monarch of bone buttons, the soda-water queen, the breakfast-coffee heiress, and the dried-fruit magnate. The merchant princes of America came here to sleep, swim, and play, forgetting their chain stores and factories.

The Bath and Tennis Club, as usual, provided swimming pools as an inducement not to go into the adjacent sea. The Club was Italian in style, with a central pool of the bluest of blue water surrounded by palm trees and an open loggia. There were splendid tennis courts, and from the built-up club house one overlooked the beach shelving to the blue Atlantic. In the cabañas, grouped around, a fortunate section of Palm Beach Society had gone to sleep, under gaudy awnings. It was difficult to believe that this was not the Venetian Lido-Excelsior on a hot August afternoon. It only wanted a voice to shriek "Mario!" with the operatic larynx of an Italian governess calling her charge, to complete the picture.

Since I might not sleep, I swam in the pool, where the

water was cooler than the sea, and a cold shower brought me back to life. I began to cherish a dream of tea under the palm trees, where a Hawaiian orchestra had begun to play for the dancers, but lingering was not allowed. I was put back into the car, and we were on our way to a cocktail party, at a house that was a mixture of a Renaissance palace, Roman villa, and an Elizabethan manor house.

In the great hall, a superb reconstruction of an English manorial room, I found myself studying armorial devices that awakened dim memories. In a few minutes I had established a clue. The oak panelling was from Withcote, Leicestershire, the county with which my family had been associated for four hundred years. Strange to encounter here, on the verge of the Gulf Stream, in the tropical scene of southern Florida, this mellowed old panelling which must have echoed, in its Leicestershire home, to the voices of my ancestors. And I was able to tell my hostess something she did not know—that it was at Withcote village that a Mrs. Paulet lived, who contracted to supply a Stilton innkeeper with cheese, thus establishing the Stilton cheese for all time in favour and fashion on the English table.

The hall was old England, the dining-room was Italian Renaissance, superbly carried out, with a carved and painted frieze. Outside, in the garden, there was a loggia that would have done credit to a Florentine villa of the *cinquecento*. No detail had been omitted from the flagged 'campo' it faced. Beyond a belvedere, one passed under its arches into a second court that changed instantly from sixteenth-century Italy to twentieth-century Florida. A very large swimming pool, having for its floor some beautiful Spanish tiles, was flanked by the inevitable palms, but an original note was struck by two large perches at each end, on which a pair of

enormous magenta and yellow parrots stretched their gorgeous wings. Never had I seen such birds, and in their ostentatious demeanour one felt that they were as vain as they were exceptional. But they suffered from a competitor in the corner, a great blue macaw, who screamed for attention, and received it.

Flood-lighting had again been applied to the trunks of the palm trees, and also to the rim of the swimming pool. The whole scene looked like the whim of a Roman emperor. This might have been the bath of Heliogabalus or Poppæa. But a small wooden cabinet, of Spanish spool-work, let into the garden wall, shattered the illusion of the grandeur that was Rome, with its note of the cocktail party which is American. It enclosed a small electric grill for cooking sausages and 'hot dogs' for pool picnics!

But it was the bar proper, tucked away in a shady corner of this courtyard, that reduced me to utter stupefaction. I could not imagine how any more money could be spent in this playground, but I had not reckoned with American ingenuity, or the fertile mind of the exterior decorator when a rich client wants novelty.

The bar was a real one, a complete one, a bar such as only old England can supply. There, sitting sedately in the shade of the palms, was *The Lord Nelson*, a London public-house, transported complete from its site, with bricks, roof, windows, glass swing-doors, counter, beer pumps, tankards, blue and white porcelain whisky and rum jars, stools and marble-top tables and benches.

On the wall was the round clock which had caused the landlord on many a night to call to his Cockney customers—"Time, gentlemen, please!" As I looked at it, and at the head of Lord Nelson in the frosted-glass windows, I could

see the aproned barman collecting empty mugs, and hear the thickset chucker-out obstructing the entry of a customer for 'a last one.'

In stupefaction at this London-piece in a Florida garden, I collapsed on a four-legged stool. I had heard of old cottages being transported intact from a Warwickshire village to an American home, but never had I imagined that England's old pubs, closed in the march of temperance reform, might cross the Atlantic as Florida garden scenery, and open their swing-doors to a rout of cocktail drinkers hot from an emerald pool shadowed by palm trees and wings of parrots.

Seated in *The Lord Nelson*, only one thing told me that I was not in a back street in Limehouse. The space under the clock was filled by a tapestry reproduction of Teniers' *Revelers*; and as every Englishman knows, the stout English landlord never mixes beer taps and tapestry. That wall decoration alone enabled me to realise that, by some magic, I had not been transported home and taken to 'have one' in *The Lord Nelson*.

"We will now go on to *The Breakers*," said my kind hostess, whose ambition to show me all phases of Palm Beach in a day was rapidly being fulfilled.

I was whirled to *The Breakers Hotel*, so large, so sumptuous, so Italianate, with its great hall, long salons, magnificent coffered ceilings, Venetian fireplaces, miles of luxuriously carpeted corridors, terraces of marble, pools and fountains, that my mind could no longer take in life conceived on a scale of luxury that Venice at the peak of her decadence had never achieved.

"Only the very best china is used," said a voice.

"The building alone cost six million dollars without furni-



ture," said another voice. "There are four hundred and fifty rooms—but it loses half a million a year," said another voice. "It is the finest hotel in the world," said another voice. "The Italian pictures on the walls alone——"

But this apotheosis of Italian architecture and American plumbing had brought me to the verge of vandalism. I felt like swinging a stick or kicking a Louis-Seize chair. At that moment I was saved for sanity by the spectacle of a man sitting paralysed in an invalid chair, who was being carried out by three porters to his double-chauffeured car. I knew he would have given away the whole of Palm Beach for the ability to kick a football; and since I had that ability, I felt rich beyond all measure.

## IV

My life with the millionaires came to an end the next noon. The negro jazz band played me out of the station. My last sight was of my charming hostess waving from her car, the chauffeur standing hat in hand, the station palms covered in a cloud of coal smoke as we drew out of the millionaires' playground.