

SUN HUNTING

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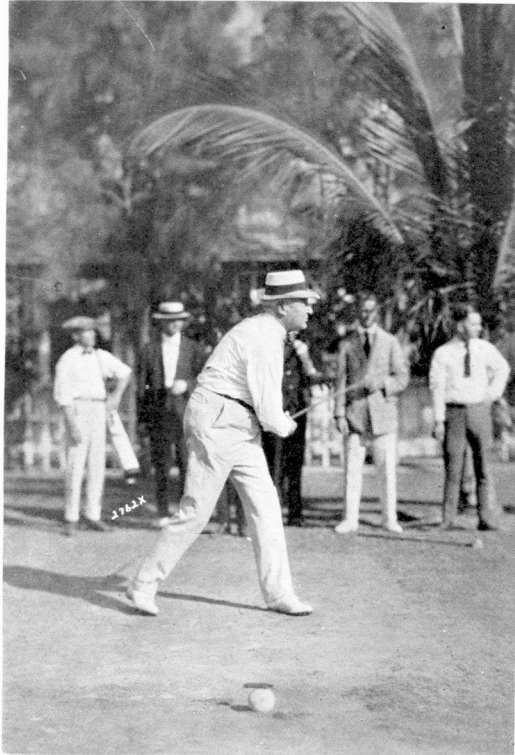
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President Harding, an occasional sun-hunter, slices one into the palmettos on one of Miami Beach's three links.

**TO
JUAN PONCE DE LEON
WHO FOUND IN 1513
THAT FLORIDA WASN'T ALL IT WAS
CRACKED UP TO BE
BUT WHO LIKED IT WELL ENOUGH
TO GO BACK
THIS BOOK IS APPRECIATIVELY
DEDICATED**

BOOK ONE

THE TIME-KILLERS

SUN HUNTING

CHAPTER I

OF TIME-KILLING IN THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH MANNER—AND OF ANCIENT AND MODERN AMERICAN TIME-SLAUGHTERERS

PEOPLE who have any time to kill are usually filled with a deep and intense desire to kill it in some spot far removed from their usual haunts.

This desire is not so much due to their wish to avoid making a mess around the house as it is to the peculiar mental obsession known to the French as “homesickness for elsewhere.” French society has been afflicted for years with a passionate desire to be somewhere that it isn’t. A Parisian with time to kill aims to move up to the clear cold air of the mountains where he can kill lots of it. When he gets to the mountains, it suddenly occurs to him that possibly he might find a little more time to kill at the seashore, where the eye may roam at will across the boundless and unobstructed waves. So he moves to the seashore and at once begins to suspect that in Paris one can find more weapons with which to cause time to die a lingering and horrible death. So he moves back to Paris, where he once more hunts restlessly for other means to kill time. He has the homesickness for elsewhere.

The English, too, have it to a marked degree. All Englishmen who have incomes larger than two hundred guineas a year own tea baskets with which they go off to distant heaths or popular woods on bank holidays and week-ends for the purpose of killing time and burying it with the appropriate funeral exercises. They are all

the time running up to the moors for a bit of rough shooting, or over to Switzerland for a bit of sheeing, or off to a country-house for a bit of punting or Scotch-drinking, or down to Brighton for a week-end. An English week-end is sadly misnamed, inasmuch as it usually consists of Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday, with a bit of Thursday and Tuesday thrown in for good measure.

Of late years, the American people have been growing increasingly proficient at time-killing. Forty years ago, the average American, confronted with a little extra time, didn't know what to do with it. Usually he took it into the front parlor and sat around on haircloth furniture with it, and became so sick of it that he never wanted to see its face again. If he felt within him the primitive urge to take it somewhere and kill it, he hesitated to do so because the roads were bad, automobiles hadn't been invented, and the South was only regarded as the place where the Civil War started. Distances were great. Few people cared to travel, because it was generally believed that a person who absented himself from business more than one working day out of every five years was a loose, dangerous and depraved character. One of the most exciting things to do forty years ago was to put on a striped flannel coat and play croquet on the front lawn.

To-day, however, America has caught the germs of "homesickness for elsewhere" from the French and English. Florida has been reclaimed from the swamps and the Indians, the small automobile has been put within the means of stevedores, cooks, second-story workers and moderately successful story-writers, and golf trousers may be worn in western towns without causing the wearer to be shot. A road is cursed fluently by an automobilist if it is bad enough to get his wheel-spokes muddy. The business man who can't knock off work for two or three

months a year is regarded pityingly as being either a back number, feeble-minded, or a poor man. All of these things being so, Americans with time to kill can take it farther from home and kill it with more thoroughness than any other people on earth. They go into their time-killing with more energy than do Europeans. The European is usually content to do his time-killing within three hundred miles of home. The American is never content unless he can travel from fifteen hundred to three thousand miles, and wind up with an orgy of time-killing that would make a professional executioner look by comparison like the president of a Dorcas society.

CHAPTER II

OF THE PASSAGE FROM WINTER TO SUMMER IN ONE DAY'S TIME— AND OF THE HABITAT OF SOME RARE SPECIMENS

IT is in Florida that the American time-killer may be found in all his glory; and the largest, most perfect and most brilliantly colored specimens are to be found at Palm Beach. It is at Palm Beach that one finds the very rare variety measuring twenty minutes from tip to tip.

One can best understand why it is that winter-bound northerners select Florida as the scene of their time-killing by following in their footsteps and boarding a Florida-bound night train in a northern city during a heavy blizzard.

Early the next morning, when one disentangles the bedclothes from his neck and elevates the trick shade of the sleeping-car window after the usual severe struggle, one finds that the snow has nearly disappeared. The eye is wearied by the flat plains of North Carolina, relieved only by negro shanties and scrub pines. By afternoon North Carolina has merged into South Carolina. The flatness continues with unbounded enthusiasm; but there is no snow and the air is milder. The pines are marked with peculiar herring-bone gashes, whence flows turpentine, the painter's delight. Piney odors, vaguely reminiscent of tar soap, sheep dip and cold-remedies, float through the half-opened windows. Later that evening, as one returns to the dining-car to recover the hat which one has forgotten in the excitement of tipping the waiter, one hears frequent shrill frog-choruses from the pools beside the tracks. By midnight one is ringing for the porter to tear himself from his

slumbers among the shoes in the smoking compartment and start the electric fans. One's rest is troubled by the heat and the increasing shrillness of the frog-choruses.

On the second morning the rising sun discloses a limitless expanse of flatness, dotted with occasional palm trees and covered with a scrubby growth of near-palms or palmettos. The sun is hot and red. A black ribbon of asphalt road parallels the railroad; and at intervals along it appear flocks of flivvers nesting drowsily among the palms and the tin-can tourists. There is plenty of glaring white sand, and plenty of stagnant water. The air is full of swallows, and an occasional pelican flops languidly alongside the train, gazing pessimistically at the passengers.

The traveler perspires lightly and marvels at the thought that it was only night before last when he slipped on a piece of ice and got half a peck of snow down the back of his neck. He remembers that it is a great and glorious country—a fact which his contemplation of the antics of Congress had caused him to forget.

Occasionally the train flashes past little towns sitting hotly in the sun and sand among a few orange and grapefruit trees. This is Florida, and the land looks as though it were worth about a nickel an acre—just as it has always looked until some one develops it and begins to sell off corner lots at a paltry five thousand dollars apiece.

Around breakfast time—a mere thirty-six hours since the train emerged from its northern blizzard and snow-drifts—the train crosses a shimmering strip of blue water and comes to rest beside a hotel that seems, at first glance, to be at least ten miles long. It stretches off so far into the distance that people up at the other end

appear to be hull-down. In reality it is only about half a mile long, and only about five hundred times larger than the Mousam House at Kennebunk, Maine.

On the station platform are women in satin skirts, gauzy waists and diamond bracelets. Young men in white trousers dash up and down the platform on bicycles. The air is soft and balmy. Palm trees stretch off into the distance in every direction. Wheel-chairs, propelled by dignified-looking negroes who sit on bicycle-seats directly behind the chairs and pedal vigorously, move hither and yon in a stately manner. Through the palm trees one catches glimpses of white yachts riding at anchor on blue water.

A wheel-chair stops at the edge of the station platform. In it are seated a dignified gentleman in white flannels, and a gracious lady in a satin skirt and a sweater covered with neat lightning effects in red, green and orange zigzags. One wonders whether this can be J. Pierpont Morgan or Charley Schwab. Then one hears the gracious lady whisper excitedly to the dignified gentleman: "Do you suppose that's Charley Schwab or J. Pierpont Morgan over there?" and hears the dignified gentleman reply in a hoarse undertone: "Shut up, or they'll think we're boobs!"

This is Palm Beach, the very center of the winter time-killing industry.

CHAPTER III

OF THE PECULIAR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TWO SIDES OF A LAKE— OF MONEY ODORS—AND OF THE QUESTERS AFTER CHARLEY SCHWAB

PALM BEACH is a long narrow strip of land which is separated from the mainland by a long narrow body of water known as Lake Worth, and by a sudden increase in living expenses. On the mainland side of Lake Worth is the rising young city of West Palm Beach, where one is not afraid—as he usually is in Palm Beach—to offer a storekeeper or a newsboy a nickel lest he should regard it as some strange, unknown foreign coin. West Palm Beach is full of ordinary people who are unacquainted with wheel-chairs and think nothing of walking two or three blocks, or even as much as half a mile if the necessity arises. They frequently get along for days at a time without spending more than two dollars and eighty-five cents a day.

West Palm Beach has the same sort of climate that Palm Beach has, but the air of the place is somehow different. At Palm Beach one has the feeling that he is breathing the very same air that the world's greatest bankers and society people are breathing, whereas over in West Palm Beach one doesn't know or care who has been breathing the air. That is why so many people find the Palm Beach climate very invigorating, but always feel that the climate of West Palm Beach leaves them a little weak and tired.

Palm Beach, then, is a long narrow strip of land with the ocean on one side and Lake Worth on the other. The largest hotel, which has room for thirteen hundred paying guests at any one time, fronts

on Lake Worth; while the next largest hotel is directly across the narrow strip of land, fronting on the ocean. In between are golf links, and roadways edged with palms and avenues of towering, feathery, bluish-green Australian pines and simple little cottages that couldn't have cost a cent more than forty or fifty thousand dollars, and modest little shacks that might have set their owners back half a million or so, and club-houses and bathing pavilions and more palms and broad white roadways and men in white flannels and women in diamonds and perfumery and clinging gowns—and more palms.

Over everything there is an odor of money. Every breeze that blows is freighted with its rich, fragrant musky smell; and every person that one encounters on the street or in a hotel lobby seems to be about to spend a lot of it or to have just finished spending a lot of it. Some people seem to like the odor and some don't seem to care so much for it. Some, in fact, seem from their expressions to think that this money-odor has a great deal in common with smoldering rubber or asafetida.

The impression that Palm Beach is bound to make on any newcomer is one of general discomfort. Everybody seems to be staring critically and curiously at everybody else—due, of course, to the fact that almost everybody hopes or suspects that everybody else may prove to be Charley Schwab or Percy Rockefeller or E. T. Stotesbury or one of those prominent society people who part their names on the side.

People who enter and leave the hotel dining-room don't seem to know what to do with their hands. They pretend to an embarrassing ease of manner, which leaves everybody acutely conscious that they are very uneasy. The people at the tables can't

keep their eyes off the people at other tables. The hotel lobbies are congested before lunch and after dinner with persons who have no interest in any scenery except that which other people are wearing. Although the beach at Palm Beach is many miles in length, all the bathers, near bathers and bather-watchers cram themselves each noon into a few square yards of beach and watch one another like a gathering of lynxes.

People dawdle along the palm-fringed avenues and stare at one another blankly and questioningly. People sit self-consciously in wheel-chairs and look searchingly at people in other wheel-chairs. Bicyclists wheel languidly along the white roads and gaze intently at every one. "Are you Charley Schwab?" each eye seems to ask mutely. "Are you one of the Stotesburys? Are you anybody?"

CHAPTER IV

OF THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE BICYCLE—OF THE USES OF WHEEL-CHAIRS—AND OF THE MENTAL ACTIVITIES OF CHAIR-CHAUFFEURS

PALM BEACH is the heaven of the bicycle. In other parts of the world it has sunk in popular esteem until it is little else than a conveyer of telegraph boys and an instrument for the removal of skin from children's knees. But in Palm Beach it shares with the wheel-chair the honor of being the chariot of wealth and beauty.

Flocks of bicycles are parked beside every hotel entrance. Broad and flawless sidewalks are reserved for bicycles and wheel-chairs. The pedestrian who sets foot on them does so at his own risk, and is more than apt, if he does so, to have his coat driven several inches into his back by the front wheel of a bicycle.

There is no bicycle costume. Beautiful lady bicyclists wear anything: rakish sport clothes, fragile afternoon gowns, flowing costumes with long capes, and more extreme evening gowns. Large numbers of girls persist in bicycling while wearing tight skirts, so that the general effect is somewhat similar to that of a pony ballet made up as messenger boys.

On side-streets, one frequently sees the almost forgotten spectacle of a frail *débutante* learning to ride. On the dance floor she would float along as lightly as a tuft of thistledown. On a bicycle she wobbles heavily and helplessly from side to side, collapsing at intervals against her instructor with all the crushing weight of a California Redwood.

The wheel-chair is the favorite Palm Beach method of locomotion, and it is the only form of exercise ever taken by many Palm Beach visitors. Many old inhabitants claim that wheel-chair riding is excellent for the liver, and devote at least two hours to it every afternoon. The negro chair chauffeurs drive the chair along by vigorous pedaling, and the alternate leg stroke gives the chair a gentle side to side motion which acts as a mild massage on the occupant. Two hours of such exercise is considered to be about enough by the most conservative Palm Beachers. It is their belief that the persons who ride for three hours run a great risk of over-exerting themselves.

The chair-chauffeurs, in addition to possessing tireless legs, are usually supplied with a vast fund of knowledge. This is most desirable; for many visitors speak to no one except the hotel clerks, the news-stand girls, the waiters and their wheel-chair chauffeurs during their entire stay. It frequently happens that their chair chauffeurs are their only guides, philosophers and friends; so the chauffeurs find it very valuable to be fairly familiar with all Palm Beach estates, to have a comprehensive grasp of the flora and fauna of the south, and to be conversant with all financial and social matters appertaining to the old-timer. They have also found that a frank exposition of their own philosophical meditations on men and things will sometimes arouse the interest and stimulate the generosity of their charges. "What sort of ducks are those, George?" usually brings the intelligent answer: "Those ain't no sort, suh. Those is just ducks." A query as to whether a wheel-chair is harder to push with one or two people in it brought the reply that there "wasn't no difference." But to push an empty one is the hardest. Yes, suh! Must be because no money is being made. Yes, suh!

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