

A LITTLE JOURNEY TO ALTONIA

The Lure of a Clockless Land Where
Summer Basks in the Lap of Winter.

By John Oliver La Gorce

BR-R-R-R, it was cold! The wind was howling along the Financial Canyons like lost souls in No Man's Land; there was a foot of inky slush on the ground and, to make matters more unbearable, the wind from the lake cut like the edge of a razor!

Somehow the mental gears weren't meshing, and I suddenly realized that this thing of working three shifts of eight hours each day was burning the candle at all three ends much too fast. It was then that I made up my mind to find some place on the North American Continent, within reasonable rail distance from the center of things, where the sun was shining, the birds were singing, and life was worth while; for, under existing conditions, it was not worth a Prussian promise, and a sort of sixth sense told me that the crinkly dispositions of the other members of my family indicated that they felt the same way about it.

Looking over a map of our Southern States, I remembered that a chap at the club had told me a lot about Miami, located down on the tip end of Florida, and as I combed out my memory for his description, it came to me that he summed it up as "a sort of earthly paradise beside the sea—the only place he ever visited which entirely lived up to the brag."

Having long since made up my mind that the ancient bromide about a coward dying a thousand deaths and a brave man but one was top-hole logic, I telephoned up to the house to get things ready; that we were leaving that afternoon for the southernmost city on the Florida mainland, and eliminated all Bolsheviki argument by remarking that while I couldn't give any first-hand information, I would be taking as much of a chance as they, and, with a warning that speeding up was the watchword, hung up the receiver.

Once in a while you can bluff the family into action and this time I rang the bell, for they achieved the impossible and got ready in time.

With the feeling that no matter what was in store for us, it could not be any worse than the frigid discomforts of November's ice and snow, we piled aboard our train, bags, boxes and babies, without a second to spare, and sallied south.

The following morning I awakened, realizing that I'd had an unusually comfortable night for a train journey, and pushed up the window curtain with a subconscious feeling that something was wrong, and sure enough—for there wasn't much snow on the ground—the sun was struggling through the clouds, and although it was still cold I rubbed my eyes in amazement at the transformation!

After routing out my "excess baggage" and getting them seated for breakfast, I learned from the Pullman highwayman, in white apron and grin, that we were well on our way, and before night would be over the line into the sovereign Commonwealth of Georgia, famous as the home of peaches and Ty Cobb!

All day we sped to the southward, passing great cities and towns rich in the romantic history of Dixie, and the second morning, or 40-odd hours after leaving the glacial ice and winds of the Central West, we arrived in Miami the Mystic, nestling beside the turquoise waters of Biscayne Bay.

ROMANCE BESIDE A SUMMER SEA

While the austere Pilgrim fathers were struggling for existence on the bleak New England coast, one of the fairest harbors in all the Western Hemisphere—Biscayne Bay—was serving as a place of retreat and hiding for the pirates of the Spanish Main. For nearly two centuries these ruthless buccanniers infested the lanes of commerce in the Caribbean and preyed upon the golden galleons which sailed that dangerous course from the Florida Keys across the Atlantic to the Old World.

Many thrilling tales are told of those olden days, tales of the sea wolves and the half-savage outlaws known as wreckers, who planted signals on the near-by keys and then fattened on the shoal-broken bodies of the luckless barks whose navigators trusted in the red glare of a promised haven only to fall victim to the ruthless pillagers with false beacons which beckoned to destruction!

But their day was of generations ago, and such sinister associations of the past only furnish a picturesque and legendary background for the most alluring winter haven of the New World—a land of never ending sunshine, cooling trade winds, and perennial flowers.

REALITY BESIDE THE SAME SEA

Our telegraphic arrangements for accommodations having been carried through successfully, we tumbled into the automobiles outside the station at Miami and started for Alton Beach, which stretches its matchless loveliness along a palm-fringed peninsula, separated from the city of Miami by Biscayne

after outdoor joys tempered with creature comforts, having come, seen, and been conquered by the pristine charm of this place, set about to make its natural beauties and advantages available to others likewise in search of health and relaxation.

Millions of dollars they expended on Alton Beach—in fact, a larger sum than has been lavished upon any other resort throughout the globe in the same length of time, not excepting the far-famed Biarritz, that favorite retreat of Spanish aristocracy, or even the romantic pleasure grounds along the Riviera.

You have awaiting you here a magnificent bathing pavilion and casino on the ocean front, with spacious Roman pools alongside, in which those who love swimming without the buffeting that the surf affords find in their graduated depths safe and healthful enjoyment. There is a matchless polo field; wonderful tennis courts; superb golf links; the finest motor-boat race-course on the Atlantic seaboard; miles of dustless, joy-giving macadam roadway; cozy homes and sumptuous villas, parks and landscape gardens—every structure in entire harmony with the soft lines and atmosphere of the tropics—all having sprung into being as if from the wand of some invisible genii.

The wonderments of Alton Beach, its beauty and charming atmosphere, cannot be told in generalities; and my mind runs faster than my pen as I picture the scenes the sheer loveliness of which even the camera can but faintly convey.

Less than a decade ago Altonia was covered with a tropical vegetation dense as an Indian jungle. In those days, the only means of access to the peninsula, which forms the eastern shores of Biscayne Bay, was by means of a sailboat or launch from Miami, and the story of man's defeat by the mild-mannered bunny sounds almost like a fable of Æsop.

COUNTING WITHOUT "BRER RABBIT"

About 50 years ago a company of planters secured for a song nearly 40 miles of beach from Alton Beach northward for the purpose of raising coconuts. Sailing ships, manned by giant negroes from the Lower Bahama Islands, just across the Gulf Stream, were sent to South America to bring back choice coconuts for planting. Upon arrival off Altonia a favorable tide was awaited, and thousands upon thousands of coconuts were tossed overboard to be washed ashore, where they were followed by the negroes, who were tied together with long ropes at equal distances apart. Each negro, upon reaching the end of his particular length of rope, would dig a hole in the sand with his foot, plant a coconut, and pass along. Labor was plentiful and cheap in those days and it did not take long to complete the planting of a great coconut nursery. The shrewd planters thought that they had covered every possible point which would militate against their success, and prepared to sit back and await dividends, for the coconut palm in that wonderful climate grows ten feet a

miles of this highway, which is to connect the east coast of the peninsula with the west coast at Tampa, have already been completed from the Miami end. It runs across the romantic Everglades, which are being drained by the same engineering operation that extends the highway. As dredges raise the rocky soil for the roadbed, the canal is created, which will be used for commerce as well as for converting this once seemingly irreclaimable land into ranches of fabulous value, over which hundreds of thousands of cattle will graze in years to come.

Along the roads the motorist finds innumerable orange and lemon groves, not forgetting the luscious grapefruit now so necessary to our breakfast table, and few of us realize that one-third of all the grapefruit produced in North America comes from Dade county in which Miami is situated. The avocado pear, pineapple, banana, and coconut grow in semi-tropical profusion amid a bewildering array of flowers, ranging from the delicate, ethereal orchid of every shade, the hibiscus as brilliant as flame, the oleander blushing like the dawn, to the twining Montana rose.

On Alton Beach itself there are more than twenty miles of roadway, bordered by tall, graceful Australian pines, so pleasing and restful because of their distinctive feather-like foliage, standing shoulder to shoulder with thousands of glorious palms; here, incredible as it may sound, trees and plants grow from four to ten feet a year! Through these eye-delighting scenes the motorist notes or the horseman rides, catching glimpses through the Brazilian rubber trees and Spanish laurel of the fragrant orange blossoms and the mimosa on the grounds of some extensive villa or attractive bungalow, with the ever-changing hues of the mighty Atlantic on the ocean side or the calm, sparkling waters of the Bay of Biscayne on the other.

THE SPELL OF A CLOCKLESS LAND

The hours pass so quickly that one can scarcely realize that the day has been spent in the interim between the dawn and the brilliant sunset when all the wonderful clouds in the heavens seem to come and hold caucus—and, as for the star-studded evening, the glory of the moonlight—well, words fail me!

Today more than 200 homes, ranging in cost from four thousand to a quarter of a million dollars, adorn this land of outdoor happiness.

So rapid and substantial has been the development of Altonia since wealthy visitors from the North and West began to winter hereabouts that Miami has realized the advisability of offering every encouragement to winter residents who would build their own homes; therefore, in co-operation with the county, it has just completed a magnificent causeway of concrete crossing Biscayne Bay, the construction of which cost more than \$600,000. This structure is equipped with boulevards on both sides of a central roadway, forming a permanent and artistic connecting link between Altonia and the mainland.

Near by is a magnificent casino, which also fronts the ocean, the last word in artistic semi-tropical architecture, having as one of its chief attractions a superb ballroom and banquet hall.

For the golf enthusiast, one finds at Alton Beach a spacious and attractive club-house overlooking an 18-hole course, carefully laid out by one of the nation's leading golf experts. A really sporty course it is, having among its most interesting hazards a picturesque "water jump" spanned at proper distances by Japanese bridges.

In the realms of tennis the facilities at Alton Beach are particularly unique; for, in addition to numerous outdoor courts, with professionals in attendance for teaching and coaching, there is a mammoth glass-roof tennis building which has no rival anywhere. This court is brilliantly illuminated for evening matches, and the outdoor courts, both clay and cement, thanks to the dry winter season, are in perfect condition from October to the end of April.

POLO GIVES PLACE TEMPORARILY TO AVIATION

Before our country entered the world war, Alton Beach especially prided itself on its perfectly equipped polo field, one of the hobbies of the man who is responsible for the development of this winter playground. The government, however, recognizing the advantages of the salubrious climate of Miami-land, needed the polo ground for an aviation field. The request was instantly granted and the field, which cost forty thousand dollars to complete, was turned over to Uncle Sam. When the war is over the swift ponies will again scamper over a turf which equals that of Aiken and Meadowbrook.

In addition to this aviation field on Alton Beach, the navy has completed a million-dollar air-training school at Miami. Here is also located a private flying school, conducted by Curtiss, and the Army Engineer Corps maintains a field for experimental purposes; which surely attest to atmospheric conditions admirably adapted to safe flying.

ALTONIA A FISHING ELDORADO

When it comes to a question of fishing, I always think of the eternal question which the Sphinx is supposed to ask: "Are all fishermen liars, or do only liars fish?" One must needs stand high in the Veracity League to be believed at home when fishing experiences in the Gulf Stream are recounted, because the catches for size, variety, and number challenge description. Along with its sea-bathing, golf, horseback riding, tennis, motor-boat racing, and polo, the supremacy of Alton Beach as a winter play-ground is generally measured by what it offers to the amateur and master fisherman. Nowhere in all the Seven Seas is found a more prolific source of supply than in the deeps of the old Atlantic just off Alton Beach, easily accessible by motor boat. Here one

may experience the thrill of outgaming the flashing sailfish or dolphin, of matching one's wits against the tiger-like barracuda, or the tarpon, while a few miles farther out the giant whip-ray, grouper, june-fish, and many other varieties are to be located and captured by the expert with hook, line, and harpoon.

I could write a book on the fishing glories of this region, should I tell, for instance, of the thousands of gamy Spanish-mackerel that are taken out of these Alton Beach waters week after week for shipment to northern markets, or of the fun of taking the red and gray snapper, the gloriously colored angel fish, and a hundred other gamsters of the finny tribe; for there are 700 known varieties in these Florida waters, making up about one-fifth of the entire fauna of America north of Panama. So you see that trolling for kingfish, jack, bluefish, spotted sea trout, and myriads of others makes Alton Beach a fisherman's happy hunting ground indeed.

A NEW WORLD AWAITS YOU

This Gulf Stream which laves the shores of Alton Beach is day and night, century in and out, ever and always pushing back the icy waters of the North Atlantic with relentless strength, and eventually forcing its way through the great ocean; it saves the British Isles from a climate and temperature corresponding to that of Labrador. No human yardstick can measure the value of this God-given warm river to mankind.

Just across the Gulf Stream, which is 50 miles wide, lie the Lower Bahama Islands. Think of the joys of sailing over a summer sea for a few hours and of approaching a low-lying coral island, covered with luxuriant tropical vegetation, plumed with towering coconut palms protecting the primitive houses of the few score Old World inhabitants, as quaint and interesting as though they had stepped out of a book.

Can you imagine the waters for miles off shore being so perfectly clear that one can easily see the white-sand bottom and bewildering submarine gardens 50 feet below. As the sunlight strikes these multi-hued waters, you behold the garden of the sea-nymphs, the home of Aphrodite! Far beneath you see through the translucent waters of this vast aquarium, lovely gardens, of undreamed-of sea flora of delicate tint. Some are pale pink, others light yellow, and some brown as leaves in autumn, surrounding the vivid purple and scarlet sea anemones, which cling to the summits of beds of pearly coral. Here violet sea-fans wave gently to and fro. There are groves of wonderful sponges, and yonder beds of marine flowers of all kinds and shapes. Fish as brilliant as humming birds—red, blue, metallic green and orange—glide in and out of the branches of this strange submarine vegetation, which is crossed and re-crossed in all directions by pathways of the soft, silvered sand. Your eyes are filled with gradations of colors challenging every hue

of the spectrum and it brings to the visitor from Alton Beach the joy of the mysterious, the thrill of seeking out the unusual; indeed, every romantic beauty of the South Sea Islands is to be found among the Bahamas, and the inhabitants are as unusual as the tiny islands that they are born, live and die upon.

MOTOR-BOAT RACING AND YACHTING

No recreation dear to the heart of lovers of outdoors is held in higher favor about Miami than is cruising and motor-boating.

The new government tidal canal from the ocean into Biscayne Bay provides a channel 18 feet in depth to the harbor at mean low tide, and here the lordly cruiser, the palatial house-boat, and the speedy runabout alike find hospitable anchorage.

The annual mid-winter motor-boat regatta, held on a 2½-mile course just off Alton Beach, in the more quiet waters of Biscayne Bay, can be witnessed from the grandstand accommodating several thousand spectators, and here take place each winter sporting events of international note. So has Altonia come to be a rendezvous for the social and financial aristocracy of America. Scores of men whose names are known from coast to coast have built beautiful homes and spend the winters with their families at Alton Beach because of its sheer beauty, glorious climate, and wealth of outdoor sports.

Motor-boat owners and those who travel in their yachts find it entirely practicable to cruise down to Alton Beach by the inland waterway, which extends along our Eastern seaboard northward a thousand miles beyond Jacksonville, and here at the height of the winter season scores of visiting yachts and all manner of pleasure craft ride gracefully at anchor, stretching for two miles along Miami's sea-wall. Alton Beach has in operation the largest and best equipped boat-building plant for speed types and cruisers south of New York, and the expert designers and builders have turned out a number of speedsters that establish new world records on the Alton course year after year.

MANY DELIGHTS FOR THE MOTORIST

In addition to the Dixie Highway, which does so much to link the North and the South and has its southern terminus in Miami, there are more than 600 miles of perfect roads radiating in every direction from Miami. Good roads are plentiful in Florida, because just a few feet below the surface of the ground is a soft marl rock that hardens to the consistency of asphalt when exposed to the air for a short time. Therefore, when this wonderful surface is oiled, it can give cards and spades to any other roadway which man's ingenuity has yet provided.

One of the most interesting of the highways out of Miami is the unique Tamiami Trail, which is being built "as a crow flies" across the Florida Everglades, so famous in the legends and history of the Seminole Indians. Thirty