

EVEN 'FRONT' MAY GET LOST

A HOTEL WITH APPARENTLY MILES OF CORRIDORS.

ROOM FOR A GOOD-SIZED DWELLING HOUSE MIGHT BE FOUND IN THE ROTUNDA—A NEW RESORT FOR WINTER VISITORS TO FLORIDA.

It is as comforting as a letter from home to see the West India fast mail fly by every day within twenty feet of the cottage where I am writing, because it comes straight from New-York. Whether it is in a land of flowers or a land of icebergs, anything from New-York is always a welcome sight to a stray New-Yorker. This West India fast mail train poked me up at Maitland a few evenings ago and carried me down to Tampa to see Mr. H. B. Plant and be shown the new Tampa Bay Hotel in advance of its opening. The appointment was made in New-York several weeks ago, when in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel we parted "till we meet in Florida." I recognized the fact that Tampa has changed completely since I knew it and that I should be a total stranger there, so as the train arrived at midnight I went on ten or fifteen miles further to Port Tampa, where The Inn, I was sure, would give me a welcome.

On going out upon the sunny piazza before breakfast, I saw a private car standing on the track in front of the hotel, and while I looked at it Mr. Plant stepped from its platform, and our meeting in Florida was accomplished. There was no further anxiety then about catching the train to return to Tampa, for, seated in the office at one end of the car, we were in a few minutes attached to a train, and shortly found ourselves at Tampa, lying on a side track directly across the river from the new hotel.

This way of traveling in a private car has so many advantages that I unhesitatingly recommend it to the public at large. The happy day may come when every man who travels will have his own car, and be absolutely independent of all hotels, railway restaurants, and baggage-masters, and when that time arrives the millennium may be expected about two weeks later. A railway car can hardly claim the sacred privacy of a home, and I think I may give a little description of the car Mr. Plant took me into. It is a small traveling house, lined with mahogany and velvet, and supplied with everything necessary to the comfort of the inner and outer man. At one end is the office I have mentioned, with its sofas and arm chairs and table. There is an electric button at the door, the bell ringing in the butler's pantry. In the rear of the office are two sleeping rooms, and beyond these the dining room, the largest room of all, with its extension table and buffet, and a desk for Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Plant's private secretary. Then a section that can be made into two berths on each side, and beyond this the baggage room, butler's pantry, and lavatories. Last of all is the kitchen, a cozy den to delight the heart of any lover of good cheer, no bigger than a pantry, but brilliant with its polished range and shining pans and kettles.

The new hotel loomed up before us across the river through the big car windows, while we ate a breakfast that was designed to fortify us for the long walk over the premises. We then crossed the new iron bridge that leads from the city side to the hotel side of the Hillsborough River, and up a smooth-paved street to the hotel's gates.

The gateway, several hundred feet from the end of the bridge, is made ornamental with posts formed of long palmetto trunks driven into the ground and rustic gates. From this, broad walks, some of cement, others of shell, lead to the centre of the buildings and in all directions over the grounds. It having been decided to go over the grounds before entering the house, we set out across the soft grass, past flower beds, fountains, palms, banana plantations, and beds of pineapples, toward the river. There is a gentle slope from house to river, and near the top of the ascent a spring of pure water bubbles from the ground and runs in a little streamlet to the shore. The moist sides of this brook have been converted into a tropical jungle, full of palms, bananas, flowers, and ferns. It was a luxury to walk over the green Bermuda grass, kept smooth with rollers and lawn mowers—for green grass, never very plenty in Florida, is particularly scarce this year after the hard frosts; but these lawns, through plentiful fertilizing, have escaped uninjured. We passed by immense beds of violets in bloom, equally large beds of blooming pansies, beds of fragrant roses, clusters of oleanders and bamboos, pineapple fields, and vast numbers of strange tropical flowers, pawpaw trees loaded with fruit, and at length stood under the palmettos by the river side, whence one of the best views of the buildings is to be had.

The hotel throughout is unlike any other building in the world, and, as seen from the river bank, perhaps a thousand feet away, its general appearance is Oriental. There are towers, minarets, and domes of varying sizes and shapes—fifteen or twenty in all. There are stories rising upon stories in unexpected places, making the main building in some places six stories high, in others four, in others three. There is a light and graceful iron veranda across the principal front, one story high at the sides, but rising in the centre so high that its roof covers the second-story windows. There is an appearance of great solidity everywhere, as there must be, for all the walls are of brick, all the beams and rafters of steel, all the floors of fire brick and cement covered with hard woods, all the partitions of fire brick. There is not, I am told, a lathed partition in the whole building, and Mr. Plant has such confidence in its proof against fire that he does not insure it.

We see, from our observation point on the river bank, that the front of the house is a segment of an immense circle. It is the same reversed in the rear, so that the narrowest part of the building is the centre. Here directly before us is the central building, six stories high, with a great Moorish tower rising from each corner. To the right and the left of this the two principal wings, also with their Moorish towers. Further to the right is an almost semicircular passageway, two stories high, leading from the main building to the dining room. Then, still to the right, the dining room, an immense building in itself, crowned with a dome of great size. Beyond the dining room, looking still to the right, are the conservatories, the dynamo buildings, the boiler houses, and last of all, the engine rooms. If I am right in estimating the distance from the river to the house at a thousand feet, then the entire frontage of the buildings is more than fifteen hundred feet.

We continued our journey over the grounds, walking in the broad avenues between the rows of palmetto trees, till we reached the engine buildings, at the extreme right. Here were immense engines for supplying all the power needed in the establishment—for lighting, pumping, lifting, and hauling. We went through the dynamo buildings, already in operation; for at that time (two weeks ago) 600 workmen were busy in the hotel by day and 400 by night under the electric lights. Near all these outer buildings were immense cemented tanks for storing rain water, to be used in the boilers and in the laundry. From the back of a telegraph blank on which Mr. Sullivan kindly put a half dozen lines of statistics for me, I learn that the capacity of these rain-water tanks is 270,000 gallons; that there are 2,436 electric lights on the premises; that there are five boilers and three engines; that the five dynamos supply both arc and incandescent lights; that the draining of the establishment is done under the Bryn Maur system, and that the water supply is from the city water works, from a large artesian well on the premises, and from the reservoirs. These are the only statistics I have.

From these working buildings we went on to the conservatory, which is not a necessity in Tampa, but a safeguard. "We shall want great quantities of flowers about the house," said Mr. Plant, "and there might come some cold nights that would shut off our supply for a few days. So we keep enough plants under glass to give us all we can need in case of accident." There were certainly enough flowers then in bloom in the conservatory to supply all the hotels in Florida. There were curious plants and flowers from all over the West Indies, from Asia and Africa, from all parts of the world. Many of these rarer ones were gifts from Mr. Plant's friends. Mr. John Hoey sent down from Hollywood half a carload of calla lilies in bulk, and these have all been potted and are in bloom, making such a gorgeous display that they look like a field of Easter lilies in Bermuda. There were great beds of lilliputian flowers, unknown to me, in pots scarcely larger than thimbles; cacti of all sorts, air plants, and quantities of ferns and other graceful things which Mr. Plant brought himself from Jamaica. Near the centre was a dead tree covered with hundreds of air plants, all put there, not by nature, but by the gardener, who had skillfully nailed them on.

From the conservatory we went to the main entrance, and so entered the house as if we were strangers in search of rooms. The counters were there, the offices, the cashier's window, the news room, all the appliances, but no gorgeous clerk withered us with his smile, no haliboy hastened forward to seize upon the owner of it all. The carpenters were still in possession, and boards and tool chests strewed the floor. We found the rotunda to be considerably larger than most dwelling houses, extending from the front to

the rear of the house. Coaches and omnibuses will arrive at the back, leaving all the space in front clear for pedestrians. Standing in the middle of this rotunda, there is an unobstructed view to both ends of the main building, through broad halls of such length that to go through them is a considerable walk. We went down one of the corridors, and here a decided novelty appeared. Hotel corridors are usually dark and gloomy; these are bright as day, though without a single window. Every doorway leading from the corridors on both sides is a Moorish arch, and the bow of the arch over the door, beginning at perhaps eight feet from the floor and running up about four feet further, is filled in with one great sheet of thick plate glass. The effect is very striking; the halls are beautifully lighted, though the privacy of the adjacent rooms is not interfered with. Another novelty is found in the doors. Every door in the house, as far as I saw them, has one large panel, including nearly the upper half of the door, covered with embossed satin. These panels are all of different colors and designs—at least there are so many varieties that no two doors look alike.

Immediately across the hallway from the foot of the main stairway is the ladies' reception room, and in the arrangement of mirrors here somebody has shown a wonderful knowledge of woman-kind. There is a landing on the stairway four or five steps up, and the wall back of this landing is concealed by a great mirror. Opposite this, in the reception room, is another large mirror; so that when a lady walks down the stairs she has an excellent opportunity before reaching the corridor of examining her costume on all sides from head to foot. The principal drawing room is an apartment of great size, finished in white and gold. The music room, or ballroom, surmounted by a dome, is a theatre of good dimensions, fitted with a stage, proscenium boxes, dressing rooms, and all the accommodations necessary in such a place. The auditorium will seat about five hundred persons, and will, when the seats are removed, make an excellent and roomy dancing room.

There are so many public rooms in this central neighborhood that it is difficult to carry them in the mind—writing rooms for ladies and other writing rooms for gentlemen; smoking rooms, card rooms, reception parlors, and what not. Workmen were busy here putting on the trimmings, which throughout the entire first floor are of mahogany, chipping and sawing into the expensive wood as though it were so much pine. We went through many more rooms in the lower part of the centre of the house than I have named, using a vast amount of energy in the journey, and bringing on some symptoms of fatigue before we got above the ground floor. On both sides of the central part the rooms of the ground floor are guest chambers for the accommodation of those who do not care to go higher. There are great numbers of these rooms—some hundreds, it seemed to me, though there could hardly have been so many.

When we entered one of the elevators and went to the top of the house to begin looking at the sleeping rooms, we determined that this inspection should be done by sample. Most of the sleeping rooms were in complete order, except that masons were putting the finishing touches to the tile fireplaces. Guests, it seems, are to be kept warm at all hazards. It is one of the most common complaints in warm countries that hotels and houses cannot be heated, and that when a cold day or night comes the inhabitants suffer. To guard against the half-dozen chilly days that reach Tampa in the course of the winter, the entire house can be heated with steam, and many of the rooms have fireplaces besides. As a rule, however, doors and windows will stand wide open.

"I like to see a whole room lighted from floor to ceiling, not merely a streak of light in the lower part, leaving the upper half gloomy," Mr. Plant said, as he pointed out the novel lighting arrangements. In every chamber a circular mirror about fifteen inches in diameter is set in the middle of the ceiling, and immediately beneath it are three incandescent electric lights that when turned on must make the apartment as bright as day. In addition to these there are two electric lights by the sides of the dressing bureau, and these are so arranged that they can be turned up and down like gas, giving a light as bright or as dim as may be desired. The sleeping rooms are all beautifully carpeted and furnished, and the beds are like couches of down; but it would be an endless task to describe the different suites, the rooms of single colors, the gold room, the sliding doors to connect or shut off, the thousand other handy things that might be mentioned; the place is too big to go into such particulars.

In one part of the house—I have no idea upon what floor, but it was some miles, I think, from the office—we entered a series of rooms filled with beautiful antique furniture from France, from Spain, from England, from wherever it could be had. Here were the articles that Mr. and Mrs. Plant have been collecting in Europe for years for this particular use; strange cabinets, inlaid chests, delicate chairs, historical furnishings from historical places, but closely packed together to save them from injury, and not, therefore, to be seen to advantage till they find their proper places.

Still, when the elevator carried us down again, we had yet in prospect a visit to the dining rooms and kitchens. The dining room of state was, when I saw it, still full of trestles and workmen, and it was a marvel to think of having it ready for guests in a few days, but they assured us that it would be ready. It is large enough to seat comfortably 800 persons at once. Overhead is a great dome, and around the tower part of this dome, but far above the floor, runs a gallery, from which the comfortable scene of 800 people eating their dinners may be enjoyed. There is no doubt about the Tampa Bay Hotel being one of the two or three great hotels of the world. Whether it is the greatest of all I shall be better able to judge after seeing it in all its light and glory in full operation.

WILLIAM DRYSDALE.