

CHAPTER

I

The Limestone Springs Prior to 1845

LOCATED almost a thousand feet above sea level in the beautiful Piedmont section of the State of South Carolina, amid the rolling lands that extend southward from the Blue Ridge Mountains of the Appalachian Range downwards toward the sea is a famous old mineral spring, noted throughout the area for its health-giving waters.

In 1835 a joint-stock company composed largely of Columbia and Charleston business men erected a commodious four-story brick summer hotel and a number of cottages on the ample grounds around this Limestone Spring and her sister springs.

Money was spent lavishly by the hotel company, and landscaping skill made the spa a place of rare beauty. Water from the great Limestone Spring was used for most purposes, but freestone water from another spring a quarter of a mile away could be had, brought across the ravine into the hotel kitchen by means of a line of bored cedar logs fitted closely together.

A description of this celebrated watering place written "by an able pen" after the erection of the hotel, will bear quoting:

"The tract of land on which the improvements and spring are situated, contains near three hundred acres, the largest portion of which is woodland. On it are inexhaustible beds of marble, and the purest blue limestone.

"On the premises are a four-story building, 274 feet long, and 40 feet wide, having a large dining-hall and corresponding drawing-rooms in the opposite wing of the house, with

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small parlors for families; upwards of 100 chambers, and every office necessary to a large establishment. Besides the principal building, there are two corresponding frame houses a story-and-a-half-high, each containing a parlor and drawing-room and six chambers; also nine double cabins two stories high, containing eighteen chambers. All the buildings are nearly new, and well finished, painted, glazed, and plastered.

"Attached to the establishment are an ice-house, store-rooms, bam, corn cribs and stabling, full sufficient for the place. . . .

"The waters are medicinal and excellent, and have been found of advantage in many complaints. The grounds are handsomely laid out, planted with trees, and sown down with blue grass. It is one of the healthiest spots on the globe; a country abounding in beautiful scenery surrounds it on every side, while near it are objects well worthy of the attention of the traveler. The justly celebrated Glenn Springs, the Kirby Springs, the beautiful White Sulphur Springs of Wilson, said to be equal in all respects to the White Sulphur of Virginia; the Revolutionary battle grounds of Blackstocks, Cowpens and King's Mountain; the fine valleys of Spartanburg, Union and York, embedding rich mines of gold and iron; various large manufactories of iron and cotton, and the villages of Union, York and Spartanburg are within a circle, of which it is the centre; the farthest being twenty-five miles distant. Several stagemail routes concentrate here, and every facility exists for communication with friends."

Induced by the "salubrity of the climate" and fleeing from the infectious summer miasma floating in the night mists of the southern swamps, causing the air to be mala *aria*, or malarial (before the Lady Anopheles mosquito was spotted as the real culprit), the planters of the Low Country had come in lucrative numbers to spend the "sickly portion of the year" at the hotel resort. They arrived in their handsome carriages drawn by spanking bays driven by trusted servants, bringing their families to enjoy the celebrated spa and its gay social life.

These are the aristocratic planters of the "Old South--of the legend in its classic form described by W. J. Cash *The Mind of the South*. Even as this witty author gaily sweeps into the limbo

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of false sentimentalities much that has been nostalgically believed of that era, a

“ . . . sort of stage piece out of the eighteenth century, wherein gesturing gentlemen move soft-spokenly against a background of rose gardens and dueling grounds, through always gallant deeds, and lovely ladies, in farthingales, never for a moment lost that exquisite remoteness which has been the dream of all men and the possession of none;SS . . . ”

Yet, even as he removes the false aura from the once-queenly head of the legendary "Old South," this historian freely acknowledges that there was a

" . . . genuine, if small, aristocracy that was the result of effective settlement and societal organization . . . In Virginia—in the Northern Neck, all along the tidewater, spreading inland along the banks of the James, the York, the Rappahannock, flinging thinly across the redlands to the valley of the Shenandoah, echoing remotely about the dangerous water of Albemarle—in South Carolina and Georgia—along a sliver of swamp country running from Charleston to Georgetown and Savannah—and in and around Hispano-Gallic New Orleans....Its social pattern was the manorial, its civilization that of the Cavalier, its ruling class an aristocracy coextensive with the planter group—men often entitled to quarter the royal arms of St. George and St. Andrew on their shields Here were silver and carriages and courtliness and manner. Here were great houses—not as great as we are sometimes told, but still great houses. . . . Charleston, called the most brilliant of American cities by Crèvecoeur, played a miniature London, with overtones of La Rochelle, to a small squirarchy of the rice plantations."

It is well to remember, as Mr. Cash goes on to suggest, a thing or two about even these Charlestonians. They did not spring full armed from the head of Jove. For two hundred years they had been working at the niceties of the matter. In a new land that had to be wrested from the forest and the original rightful owners, the odds were heavy against aristocrats. Undoubtedly there were some, brought over from the old country by the law of primogeniture to have a fling with fortune and adventure, but the actual

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Cavalier was rare, even in Coastal Carolina. Two hundred years, however, had given the dimension of time, and the patrons of the Limestone Springs Hotel had built up a Cotton Kingdom that produced a way of life that was at least reminiscent of the gentility and the urbanity of the Old Country.

There was amusement a-plenty at the resort, horse-racing by day and card-playing and dancing by night.

The "Race Paths", surveyed in 1837, were a mile distant, where some of the "finest horses the country afforded were groomed, exercised and run, and these, together with the close proximity to the mountain region, offered special inducements to ... a popular resort for the summer season." A now yellowed copy of *The Carolina Spartan* carried the once exciting news that "The match and race between Thicketty and Traveler over the course at Limestone for a \$3,400 purse came off last Thursday, and was won by Thicketty." On this same track appeared from time to time some of the best and fastest horses in the whole South.

A large pavilion was built near the Spring in which other types of amusement were held. Sometimes on Saturday afternoons the frontier would take over, and the gentry, so recently removed from the frontier themselves, would lay aside their fine garments for the homespun, and gander-pullings and greased-pig chasing and folk racing were the order of the day, brought down to much later time in the Fourth of July celebrations of the entire Piedmont area on the same spacious picnic grounds near the Spring,

In quieter moments the hoopskirted belles with their chivalrous gallants strolled sedately about the beautiful hotel grounds, under the sheltering stately elms and huge water oaks, their long skirts trailing, as they passed, the periwinkles and the wild daisies dotting the grassy earth beneath their slippered feet; or they danced the polka, the waltz, and the mazurka in the hotel ballrooms with "joy unconfined" before the adumbrations of War cast ominous shadows across the Sunny South.

This was the Old South of the legend in its "classical form," and for a time all went merry as a wedding bell. The hotel survived the financial panic of 1837 with its resultant depression. Gradually, however, the patronage of the place began to decline even though some of the wealthier men had purchased lots and built spacious summer homes on the knolls overlooking the Spring, and several families resided there year round, "constituting a neat village, and affording an intelligent and agreeable society." The Governor of

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the State had erected a three-story dwelling, with a ballroom on the top floor and an avenue of cedars leading to the front entrance.

Finally, after some years of near bankruptcy, the original Hotel Corporation was forced to close the resort. The Bank of the State of South Carolina held a mortgage for \$21,200 it had lent on the property, and in 1844 the Bank put the resort on the market to satisfy the \$10,000 remaining on the debt. When the property was put up for sale, Mr. Benjamin Wofford, of Spartanburg, a Methodist minister who had for some years carried in his heart a dream of using a part of his accumulated fortune for some religious or educational purpose, agreed to pay the Bank the \$10,000. Had Mr. Wofford, the founder of the college that bears his name, been able to agree with the Bank in the ensuing difference of opinion as to the interest due, Wofford College would have been located at the Limestone Springs instead of in Spartanburg, nine years later.

Dr. D. D. Wallace in his history of Wofford College comments thus on the matter:

"It has always been assumed that in trying in 1844 to buy the Limestone Springs Company property at the later Gaffney he [Mr. Wofford] was seeking to obtain, at a most attractive bargain, as it would have been, a site for the college which he had determined to found. Dr. Carlisle's expression is that his intention was to give it to the Conference for educational purposes.... When the time came for final settlement [with the Bank] a difference arose over a small amount of interest. Both sides stuck to what they considered their rights and the trade was called off. The property went to Dr. Thomas Curtis, an able and learned English Baptist clergyman, and his clergyman son, William, in 1845 for \$10,000.00 who at once opened the Limestone Springs Female High School, which eventually grew into the present Limestone College."

Thomas Curtis also carried a dream in his heart. He paid the Bank of the State of South Carolina the amount due, received the titles to the buildings and land, and was deeded the interests of the Hotel Corporation by F. H. Elmore." A most attractive bargain" indeed!

On November 6, 1845, the Limestone Springs Female High School was opened for the reception of students, and sixty-seven young women were enrolled.