

CAMP AS YOU LIKE IT.
Little Switzerland, N. C. Aug. 19th, 1918.

The Hon. Henry A. M. Smith.
Charleston, South Carolina.

Dear Sir:-

Inclosed you will find a statement in detail of what I know about Cedar Grove House. I am aware that it is a great deal more than you asked for, and I am afraid that you may be tired by so much detail. But I have taken this risk because I knew that if I do not seize the opportunity to preserve the record of so notable a house, it would be forever lost; for I am the only one who can and would describe Cedar Grove just as it was. I am prompted to do this all the more strongly by noting that even the indefatigable antiquarian that you are, knows nothing about this monument of the Colonial era of lower South Carolina. So you see that this is as I said a labour of love.

You are evidently misinformed as to my age, since you think that my recollections of Cedar Grove would be those of a boy. On the 11th of July 1918, I completed my eighty fourth year. When Cedar Grove was sold and Willbrook purchased in 1858, I was 24 years old and had been in the Engineer Corps of the Blue Ridge Railroad since my graduation at the College of Charleston in March 1854. I mention these personal facts because naturally my account of the house, its dimensions and details of construction would possess greater value and weight coming from one of mature age and a trained Civil Engineer, than as the uncertain recollections of a boy. Allow me to add that my life from infancy to manhood was lived at Cedar Grove.

I must beg your charitable consideration of the rather uncouth form and appearance of the report I send you. I wrote in pencil because it is far easier for me than writing with the pen; and besides I intended to have it copied. But there has been such long delay that I take the liberty to send the paper just as it is.

As to Willbrook, I know very little about it from the antiquarian point of view, but soon I shall send you what I know of the plantation.

Very respectfully,

CHARLES S. DWIGHT.

CEDAR GROVE HOUSE.

The mansion was massive and dignified, having a basement and two lofty stories and built of solid brick rough casted. The walls were of extraordinary thickness; up to the level of the main floor they were certainly 30 inches thick; then they were reduced by the width of a brick of that time (4-1/5 inches) this effect showing all around the outside. A fine cornice crowned the wall all around. At the level of the second story there was another offset inside, reducing the wall to say 21 inches. So thick were the walls that at every window on both the lower and upper floors there was a deep window seat in the wall. The basement was 9 feet high, 3 feet below and 6 feet above ground. The main story was 14 feet high, the upper 12 feet high.

The house was 53 to 55 feet by 43 to 45 feet, the longer side being parallel to the river and certainly 36 feet from ground to eaves. The roof was hipped and there were 5 dormer windows.

The basement was paved with large yellow flagstones; in it were the kitchen, pantry, utensil room, plate closet, and a large wood house. In the kitchen were a vast cavernous fireplace, equipped with hooks and cranes, and a spacious brick oven.

The main floor was reached on both the river and avenue sides by massive brown stone steps supported by brick arches and having wrought iron hand rails. A broad piazza resting upon brick arches extended almost the whole length of the river front, affording a full view of Middleton Place and of the river to the Wragg Smith place. On the avenue side, there was a beautiful portico of classic design paved with alternate black and white marble squares, laid diagonally and bordered by brown sandstone. The turned Cypress columns rested upon square blocks of grey sandstone. The entire portico was supported by beautifully built groined arches.

This portico was really the main entrance to the house. From it through a bi-fold door having glass panels and semi-circular fanlight, the great "parlor" was reached - a beautiful room 23x34 feet and 14 feet high. It was completely panelled and varnished with cypress. Over the ample fireplace on the North side was an exquisite mantelpiece of Italian Marble of many different kinds and colours; the headpiece and pilasters being pure white. This mantel was more than 6 feet high.

Opposite the fireplace a beveled mirror about 2-1/3 x 8 feet was set into the panel. Around the mirror was a frame of flowers and vines and grapes, and at the top a basket of flowers, some

trailing down from it - all most life like and exquisitely carved in wood. On the south side of the parlour were the main door and a "blind" door both having semicircular fanlights. The upper half of the "blind" door was supported by brass springs, and could be let down for better ventilation in warm weather.

Beyond these doors was a spacious hall leading directly to the river piazza and on the left to the dining room, on the right to the staircase and to the pantry and plate closet etc. The staircase was beautifully built, having easy rise with two flights and a platform, and mahogany handrail and bevel posts, and well lighted by two windows which were on a level with those on the upper story. Under this staircase the descent to the basement was placed.

The dining room was finished like the parlour, fine cornice and paneling. The fireplace was ample and surmounted by a mantel of variegated blue Italian Marble of convenient height. Opposite the fireplace was a dining room closet sunken into the thickness of the wall, semicircular in form with semicircular head and bivalve door - a pretty concept perfectly executed.

All windows had four leaved paneled shutters that folded into the wall on each side. There were no blinds on the outside.

Over the mantelplace in both parlour and dining room, there was, taking the place of a square panel, an oil painting depicting native life and scenery. The pictures were remarkably well preserved, and the late Charles Fraser, who was often at Cedar Grove, told my father that they possessed "considerable merit". The painter is unknown. On each side of the parlour there was a room of convenient size with fireplaces, one used as a bedroom, the other as a library. Between the dining room and this bed room were a passage way and roomy linen closet.

On the second story the staircase landed on a spacious hall, upon which opened four large bed rooms, two dressing rooms, a large linen closet and the stairway to the garret rooms. These dressing rooms also of course opened into the adjacent bed rooms. Every bedroom had an ample fireplace and adjoining dressing room. The entire upper story was wainscotted, the walls and ceilings lathed and plastered. On the lower story the ceilings only were plastered.

The four garret rooms were lathed and plastered, each one was lighted by a dormer window, as was the hall between the rooms. There were no fireplaces on this floor.

To recapitulate; there were in the basement five apartments large and small; on the lower floor five large and two small rooms and spacious hall and staircase; on the upper floor four large bed rooms, 4 dressing rooms (2 of them opening on the hall and large enough for dormitories) and a large linen closet; in the garret 4 rooms.

The workmanship, especially the carpentry and joinery, was singularly fine and could not be excelled even in our time, I believe. The quality of the material used, all excepting the cypress, imported from England, was the finest, for my father made comparatively small repairs during his time, and he jealously guarded every original feature of the house.

Approached from the avenue or viewed from the river side Cedar Grove house was indeed noble and impressive. The fine trees, the extensive grounds perfectly kept, the broad mile long avenue and the winding river contributed to making a worthy setting for the grand old mansion. I am sure that Cedar Grove, was with the single exception of Drayton Hall, the finest house on Ashley River, and I have seen and been in every one of them.

The mound, affectionately called The Mountain by us children, had no summer house on its top, nor was there any trace of one in my time. The spiral path was never I am sure, wide enough for a vehicle, nor could have the area of the top have afforded room for one.

I will only add that between the dwelling and the mound father nursed a beautiful display of roses of several varieties, gardenias, mimosas, sweet shrubs, bays etc all gone no doubt. And just there stood a sundial made in London, its support was a circular base, say five feet in diameter and shaft with counter-sunk panels, all of finely dressed yellow sandstone.

CHARLES S. DWIGHT.

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