

“The Old National Road”

THE following, by William Bayard Hale, appears in the *Century Magazine* for December, 1911:—

“ . . . Bless me! it did not remain for this generation to build good roads even in America. Has everybody forgotten that splendid highway which, before the day of the locomotive, the Government at Washington threw across the Alleghanies and pushed to the Mississippi—forgotten the romance and history that flowed over it—forgotten the surge of that fulfilling tide of civilisation which, after the Revolution, found its outlet to the imperial West past the milestones that stretched—and stretch today from Cumberland on the Potomac to St. Louis on the Father of Waters? Some of us have not forgotten. . . .

“ During one period of each year in particular the capacity of the National Road seemed tried to its limits by processions of family carriages of the type possessed by every well-to-do Western family. They were filled with Quakers coming to Yearly Meeting [at Richmond, Ind.], some from the region of Spiceland and Dublin, more from Wilmington and Cincinnati, Spring Valley, and Waynesville. Once each year, at the mellow season of late autumn, when the harvests had been safely gathered and the men were free for a fortnight, filling our little city with their soberly garbed figures, and filling the great Yearly Meeting-house—as big as the Metropolitan Opera House—morning, afternoon and nights, with throngs which came and sat and departed in a silence and composure impossible to believe. There may have been for an hour, in the vast barn of a place, no stir save the lazy buzzing of a fly high up against a window, or the gentle nodding of the oak (calculated to be one thousand years old) seen through the unpainted glass, when Esther Frame, or Robert Douglas, or some other celebrated Friend, would rise and break forth in a rhapsody of spiritual exaltation. There would be no movement when the high voice, sustained to the end like a chant, without an amen, died away; none

until presently the Friend 'at the head of the meeting' extended his hand to his nearest neighbor, and the meeting took a deep breath and 'rose'

"The National Road was really built, according to the settled belief of my grand-mother, Ann Harlan, in order to enable the Friends of Clinton County, Ohio, to come to Yearly Meeting at Richmond. To be sure the histories talk of other purposes . . . my grand-mother takes no stock in such talk. She understands thoroughly that that rough but God-fearing man, Andrew Jackson, understood the needs of the Friends who had come up from North Carolina in the early years of the nineteenth century—had carved out of the wilderness the opulent farms and built the goodly towns of the Little Miami and Whitewater valleys and established their religious capital at Richmond. She had always been thankful to Andrew Jackson, as she was to Providence, for all such things as it is the duty of Providence and Presidents to provide for the righteous, and she travels the National Pike back and forth every year (she has made the journey more than seventy times) to Whitewater Yearly Meeting with an undisturbed conscience of her own, and a tranquil trust in the goodness of all men and of the workings of all God's world."

The writer's kindly, humorous picture of his Grandmother, Ann Harlan, should be read in full by every lover of Quakerism; it is too long to copy here. Her earliest trips to Yearly Meeting had been on horseback. The writer has been absent from home for years and as he speaks of it being Yearly Meeting time the evening of his return, a new light flashes over "Linden Hill" and there arrives:

"A panting, six-cylinder motor-car bringing Grandmother Harlan in huge automobile coat and goggles" to Yearly Meeting. They are an hour late for the Fourth-day evening meeting, because of an accident by the way, that sorely "tempted Eli" to depart from the yea, yea; nay, nay of the Quakers! At her grandson's evident surprise at this new mode of travel Grandmother Harlan placidly says (a new quotation to him)—"Thee knows, William, that the Good Book says the horse is a vain thing for safety."