

## The Inner Light

There are in the United States to-day approximately one hundred and ten thousand members of the various branches of the Society of Friends. About eight thousand of these live in the State of Iowa. The number of Friends, or Quakers, as they are commonly called, has never been large, but in spite of their small number, the men and women of this faith have played an influential part in establishing the moral standards of many communities.

It is not strange that this has been so. Progress is achieved not by followers, but by individuals with initiative, and the cornerstone of Quaker character and conduct has always been individualism. Not the selfish principle that so often goes by that name of every man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost, but that finer individualism of the true pioneer — that every one should help himself and in case of need lend a hand to his neighbor.

This principle of independence began with their religion. George Fox, the founder of the Religious Society of Friends, taught his followers that "the manifestation of the Spirit" was given to every man and upon this "Inner Light" each Friend was taught to depend. Religion was a matter solely between the individual and God. The responsibility could not be shifted to church or state, minister or

priest. The Friends believed that the Bible was a revelation of God but not even this could be followed as the sole guide in deciding new problems. The individual was held responsible for his decisions and acts. No spiritual crutches were provided.

To the early Quakers, membership in the Society was, and still is, a prize to be won and that not too easily. Children of Quaker parents inherit a birth-right membership in the meeting to which their parents belong. Others may be admitted upon showing evidence of their sincere acceptance of the principles of the Friends. No attempt is made to persuade people to join the Society; the person wishing to join must request that he be admitted. True to their belief that it is the inner life and not formal ceremonies which testify to spiritual life, the Friends dispense with baptism, the Lord's Supper, and other services in use in most churches.

The second fundamental principle of the Friends is their insistence that outward conduct conform strictly to the inward revelation. A Quaker is not permitted to compromise with sin so far as his own conduct is concerned. As in the case of the early Christians persecutions are to be endured, but principle is not to be sacrificed.

On the other hand the Friends believe that other people have a right to their own beliefs. Each individual is responsible to God and the Quaker does not interfere, though he carries his message far and wide. It is true that the rules of the Society of

Friends have been strictly enforced and erring members have frequently been excluded from the meeting but such persons have been free to go and worship in peace; the Friends do not interfere.

These principles, taken together, explain why the Friends very early adopted a number of ideas and customs which seem peculiar. Some of these ideas were really fundamental and have gradually been accepted by the rest of the world. Among these is the equality of men and women. If the adult individual is to be held responsible to God for his acts, the woman as well as the man must be a free agent. Women were preachers and missionaries in the Society of Friends from the beginning and, due no doubt to Quaker influence, women were legally qualified to vote in New Jersey from 1776 to 1807.

Originally the Friends adopted the plan of having separate meetings for men and women. This arrangement was partly due to the belief that women could handle their problems better in a separate group and partly to a desire to silence charges of immorality brought against them during the period of persecution. Separate seating of men and women in the meeting-house has been retained by the Friends in all but one branch.

The same recognition of personal responsibility and personal independence early led the Friends to an uncompromising opposition to slavery. A man could not be expected to serve God if held to bondage under a master. As a result most Quakers be-

came ardent abolitionists. Many Quaker homes in Iowa were stations on the Underground Railroad and the quiet, non-resisting but persistent Friends were among the most efficient conductors on the road. The Quakers believed in obedience to civil authorities — except where the law required them to do something which, according to their principles, seemed morally wrong. Hence they had no scruples against out-witting the slave catchers. Lie or fight they would not, but there were many other way of assisting the fugitives to evade the pursuers.

A story may be told to illustrate their quiet shrewdness which was so often revealed in the operation of the Underground Railroad. Two slave girls had sought shelter at a Quaker home. Suddenly the master of the girls and several other men appeared and demanded the surrender of the slaves. The old Quaker, more concerned at that moment about the safety of the girls than for the doctrine of non-resistance, defied the men to enter his house. At this critical moment the Quaker housewife appeared and urged her husband to admit the men. "Thee knows", she said quietly, "that they will not find any slaves here." Nor did they: the girls had been hidden beneath the feather beds. Even if the girls had been discovered, the Quaker woman could doubtless have insisted that she told the truth: in her belief no one was a slave.

The doctrine of non-resistance which has been one of the unusual characteristics of Quaker faith is, of

course, based partly upon the Biblical teaching, but it, too, is interwoven with this emphasis on individual responsibility. The Quakers do not believe in coercion of any kind, not even in forcible resistance to persecution. Their definite and persistent opposition to war as a method of settling disputes has made them very unpopular on various occasions both in Europe and America; but criticism of the Friends in this matter has been greatly diminished by the recognition that this refusal to engage in combatant war service is not due to fear of injury nor to unwillingness to endure discomfort. The Quaker dislikes war because he believes it is wrong to hurt another person, not because he fears injury himself. As a matter of fact Quakers have sometimes taken up arms when convinced that the war was just, and they have ever been willing to care for the wounded, to bury the dead, and to give relief to civilians in need, no matter how great the danger or hardships.

Holding rather strictly to the teaching of primitive Christianity, the Friends have been characterized by simplicity in dress, speech, conduct, and mode of life. Their meeting-houses have always been plain and the interiors unadorned. Industry and frugality have marked their home life and kept them above want in spite of frequent persecutions. Early in their history the Friends adopted a distinctive style of dress. This must be plain, so that Friends who could not afford expensive clothing would not be embarrassed by the richer dress of their fellows.

Children were taught that this dress was a symbol of the Society and that no Quaker should sully the costume by appearing in questionable places or company or by acting to bring discredit on his faith.

A number of the interesting customs of the Friends are explained by their insistence on personal equality before God. To remove the hat in the presence of another was once a sign of servility or at least of some inequality of rank or station. A Quaker removed his hat when he prayed, but kept it on in the presence of King, civil magistrate, noble, priest, or minister, in meeting or in court. Since this act has become merely an act of social courtesy without any implication of inferiority, Friends probably do not feel that it is now as significant as it formerly was. Indeed, a number of the non-essential requirements as to dress, speech, and behavior have been abandoned, especially by the liberal groups.

Another peculiarity of the Friends is the use of "thee" and "thou" instead of the usual "you". This, too, goes back to an earlier time. When the Society of Friends was first organized the pronouns "thou" and "thee" were used when speaking to an equal or to one of inferior social standing, while "you" was used by an inferior in addressing a superior. The Friend, insistent upon his equality before all men, invariably said "thee" and "thou", though this mark of Quaker training has now lost its significance. It has, in fact, been largely discarded by many Friends.

For the same reason, the Friends have always refused to use titles, which denote political or social superiority. The simple prefix "Friend" was adopted as the usual form of address and was used to rich and poor, master and servant, nobles and commoners alike. Even "Mister" was rejected as a corruption of the term "Master", and no one was recognized as the master of the Quaker: he was decidedly the "captain of his soul". Friends, however, had no objection to such official titles as President or Governor, since the Bible recognized the need of public officers and the duty of the individual to obey them — unless obedience involved violation of a moral principle.

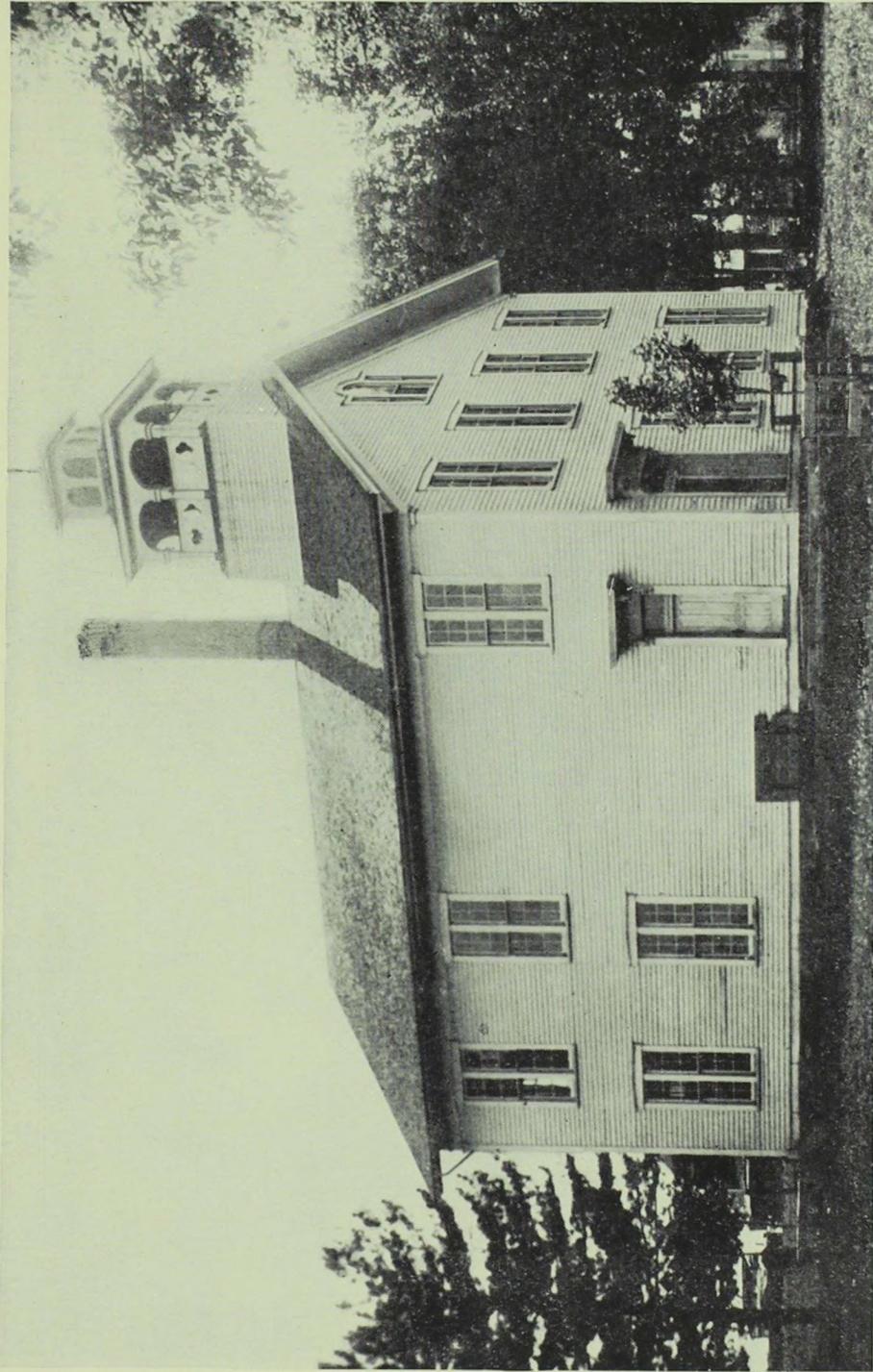
Since the Quaker recognizes no intermediary between himself and God and assumes full responsibility for his own spiritual decisions, the service in the meeting-houses of the Friends is simplicity itself. The Society of Friends makes no provision for an ordained minister. Men or women gifted with spiritual leadership are frequently designated as ministers or preachers, but without salary or official authority. The congregation enters quietly and sits for a time in silence, each member meditating upon spiritual things. Any member may speak if the spirit so moves. Those who speak in meeting often fall into a sing-song rhythm. There is no excitement or emotional appeal. Only one branch of the Friends uses musical instruments and singing in their religious services. The Quaker meeting depends for its

inspiration not upon the eloquence of the minister, the beauty of the surroundings, or the excellence of the music, but upon the revelation of God to the members.

This simplicity of service also characterizes their marriage ceremony. There are to the Friends only three parties to a marriage — God, the man, and the woman. There is no wedding march and no minister to read the service. The man and woman who desire to marry rise in the midst of the congregation, join hands, and the man first says: "In the presence of the Lord, and before this assembly, I take [her name] to be my wife; promising, with divine assistance to be unto her a loving and faithful husband, until death shall separate us." The woman recites a corresponding pledge. Special provisions have been made in the Iowa law concerning the performance of marriage ceremonies to make this form legal. The requirements as to the civil license are observed.

Friends look upon marriage as a solemn obligation not to be lightly undertaken or made the subject of trivial jokes. The marriage of a Friend to a man or woman outside the Society is not approved. The home life in Quaker families has usually been wholesome. In spite of the serious attitude toward life, Friends have usually been cheerful and the life of the boys and girls not unpleasant. Probably the worst trial of the youngsters has been the silent meetings.

The Friends have always emphasized the duty of



COURTESY OF BETH MATHER HIGBEE

THE OLD SPRINGDALE HIGH SCHOOL

charity, and in charitable work they make no distinction as to creed, race, social class, nationality, color, or religion. It is said that one Danish Friend, upon his arrival in Cedar County, was given a cow by kindly neighbors. He decided that this was a worthwhile precedent and in after years he gave a cow to any family of Danish Friends who arrived in the community. In spite of their belief in individual action, the Quakers approve of associations for all good works. The Friends were active in relief work during the World War. Quaker hospitality was noteworthy, even in an age distinguished by that virtue, and no one who applies for shelter is turned away.

The attitude of the Quaker toward society in general may be summed up in a quotation from *American Individualism*, by Herbert Hoover. In this he presents his ideal of American democracy: "that while we build our society upon the attainment of the individual, we shall safeguard to every individual an equality of opportunity to take that position in the community to which his intelligence, character, ability and ambition entitle him; that we keep the social solution free from frozen strata of classes; that we shall stimulate effort of each individual to achievement; that through an enlarging sense of responsibility and understanding we shall assist him to this attainment; while he in turn must stand up to the emery wheel of competition."

RUTH A. GALLAHER