

THE PAOLI LOCAL

IT IS ALWAYS puzzling to the wayfarer, when he has traveled to some sacred spot, to find the local denizens going about their concerns as though unaware that they are on enchanted ground. It used to seem a hideous profanation to the Baedeker-stained tourist from Marsupial City, Ind., to step off the train at Stratford and find the butcher's cart jogging about with flanks and rumps. And even so does it seem odd to me that people are getting aboard the Paoli local every day, just as though it were the normal thing to do instead of (what it really is) an excursion into Arcadia.

Some day a poet will lutanize the Paoli local as it ought to be done, in a tender strain—

Along that green embowered track
My heart throws off its pedlar's pack
In memory commuting back
Now swiftly and now slowly—
Ah! lucky people, you, in sooth
Who ride that caravan of youth
The Local to Paoli!

The 2:15 train is a good one to take, for it affords an interesting opportunity to observe those who may be called sub-commuters: the people who come in town in the morning, like honest working folk, but get back to the country after lunch. These, of course, are only half-breed commuters. They are the silver-chevron suburbanites, deserving not the true golden stripes of those who moil all day. They are teachers, schoolboys, golfomaniacs and damsels from the home of Athene, Bryn Mawr. They are mere cherubim and seraphim, not archangels. Stern and grizzled veterans, who go home on the HJw6:05 ("H" Will not run New Year's, Memorial, Independence, Thanksgiving and

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY'S PHILADELPHIA

Christmas Days; "j" will not run Saturdays June 7 to Sept. 27, both inclusive; "w" No baggage service), speak of them scornfully as "Sam Browne belt commuters."

One who was nourished along the line of the Paoli local, who knew it long before it became electrified with those spider-leg trolleys on its roof and before the Wynnewood embankments were lined with neat little garages, sometimes has an inner pang that it is getting a bit too civilized. And yet no train will ever mean to us what that does! The saying that was good enough for Queen Mary and Mr. Browning is good enough for me. When I die, you will find the words PAOLI LOCAL indelible on my heart. When the Corsican patriot's bicentennial comes along, in 1925, I hope there will be a grand reunion of all the old travelers along that line. The railroad will run specially decorated trains and distribute souvenirs among commuters of more than forty years' standing. The campus of Haverford College will be the scene of a mass-meeting. There will be reminiscent addresses by those who recall when the tracks ran along Railroad avenue at Haverford and up through Preston. An express agent will be barbecued, and there will be dancing and song and passing of the mead cup until far into the night.

The first surprise the Paoli local gives one never fails to cause a mild wonder. Just after leaving West Philadelphia Station you see William Penn looming up away on the right. As you are convinced that you left him straight behind, and have not noticed any curve, the sensation is odd. At Fifty-second street rise the shallow green slopes of George's Hill, with its Total Abstinence fountain. Nearer the track are wide tracts of vacant ground where some small boys of the sort so delightfully limned by Fontaine Fox have scooped military dug-outs, roofed over with cast-off sheets of corrugated iron, very lifelike to see.

At Overbrook one gets one's first glimpse of those highly civilized suburbs. It is a gloriously sunny May afternoon.

Three girls are sitting under a hedge at the top of the embankment reading a magazine. The little iron fences, so characteristic of the Main Line, make their appearance. A lady tubed in a tight skirt totters valiantly down the road toward the station, and the courteous train waits for her. If the director general of railroads were a bachelor perhaps he would insert a new footnote in his time-tables: "Sk," will not wait for ladies in hobble skirts. The signal gives its blithe little double chirp and we are off again.

Toward Merion we skirt a brightly sliding little brook under willow trees, with glimpses of daintily supervised wilderness. It is all so trimly artifice that one is surprised to see that the rubbery stalks of the dandelion have evaded the lawn-mower just as they do in less carefully razored suburbs. Honeysuckles sprawl along the embankments, privet hedges bound neat gardens. There is a new station at Merion. In old bucolic days the Main Line station masters lived and kept house in the depots, and if one had to wait for a train one could make friends with the station master's little girl and pet cat. But all those little girls are grown up now and are Bryn Mawr alumnae.

At Narberth one sees clustered roofs embowered in trees, in the hollow below the railway, and a snatch of plowed land. Now one is really in the country. Narberth, Wynnewood, Ardmore, Haverford—so it runs, like a chapter of begats. At Wynnewood, if you are sitting on the right, you see an alluring vista of a long alley through sunspeckled greenery. The baggage agent has nailed an old chair seat to a little wooden box which provides a meditating throne for such small leisure as a Main Line baggage agent gets. Ardmore—strange to think that it used to call itself Athensville—doesn't quite know whether it is a suburb or a city. Clumps of iris look upon busy freight yards; back gardens with fluttering Monday linen face upon a factory and a gas tank. And then, in a flash, one is at Haverford, the goal of pilgrimage.

Haverford is changed as little as any of the suburbs since the days when one knew it by heart. Yet Mr. Harbaugh has moved his pharmacy to a new building and it can never be quite the same! The old stuffed owl sits bravely in the new window, but the familiar drug-scented haunt where we drank our first soda and bought our first tobacco is empty and forlorn. But the deep buttercup meadow by the Lancaster pike is still broad and green, with the same fawn-colored velvety cow grazing.

And there is one thing that they can never change: the smell of the Haverford lawns in May, when the grass is being mowed. A dazzling pervasion of sunlight loiters over those gentle slopes, draws up the breath of the grass, blue space is rich with its balmy savor. Under the arches of the old maples are the white figures of the cricketers. In the memorial garden behind the library the blue phlox is out in pale masses. The archway of the beech hedge looks down on the huge prostrate mock-orange tree. Under the hemlocks (I hope they're hemlocks) by the observatory is that curious soft, dry, bleached grass which is so perfect to lie on with a book and not read it. And here comes Harry Carter careering over the lawns with his gasoline mowing machine. Everything is the same at heart. And that is why it's the perfect pilgrimage, the loveliest spot on earth, then, now and forever!