

Levi Pennington

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My Literary "Career"

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MY LITERARY "CAREER"

If everything I have written were put into printed form and bound into nooks, I'm sure that it would make more than a "Five Foot Shelf" so famous some years ago. For years as a news paper man I wrote thousands of words a day; for decades I have written from 1000 to 1500 personal letters ^{every year}. I didn't learn to write correctly on a type writer, but though I used the Hunt & Peck system I could write sixty words a minute, and many of my letters are much too long. (They say that one page is all right; two pages is a misdemeanor; three pages constitutes a felony; and four pages is a capital crime. How'd I ever escape hanging?)

Unfortunately most of the things I have written could not be called literature by the wildest stretch of the imagination. But I have produced some things that have seen the light of day in something a bit beyond the daily newspaper story.

I've written a grist of short stories, some of which sold, some failed to sell, of course because of the lack of appreciation on the part of some editor, some doubtless because there was so little to appreciate. I sold three fish stories to The Youth's Companion "away back when", each one bringing a higher price than its predecessor. (The Youth's Companion died before the third story was published, but I never admitted that it was my stories that killed it. And one of the stories got into the Harvard Junior Classics.)

Some of my best stories never saw an editor and were never seen by an editor. One of them, written before the Wright Brothers and Kittyhawk, told of a successful airplane that had already been invented, with power that antedated the use of atomic power. One of them was a good story, "Just Like a Woman", that would never sell because it violates an editorial tradition as unchanging as the law of the Medes and Persians. "High Blood Pressure"; "The Bar Sinister"; "Marriages Are Made in Heaven -- Sometimes"; "We've Got a Brand New Organ"; "Kertis -- Master Magician"; "The Back-Seat Driver" -- the list is a long one. Right here on my desk is one that I think is really good, though written sixty years ago and never even typed.

Out of the realm of fiction and into the field of educational and religious writing, the quantity is probably more noticeable than the ~~quality~~ ^{not the quality}, though some of it has been quoted or originally printed where a good many thousands had a chance to read it. For a long time a weekly contribution to a religious magazine; a series of articles for the Homiletic Review (also defunct, but it lived long after those ~~articles~~ ^{publications}); articles, essays, verse, for maybe a score of educational, religious and literary publications, much of it so completely forgotten or at least misplaced in memory that when I find it occasionally it is surprisingly fresh and interesting *to me*.

I have four or five book-length manuscripts that will never get into book form unless my rich uncle should die and leave me something like a hundred thousand dollars. (The trouble with that is that I do not have a living uncle, if I did he'd not have money, if he had he'd outlive me, and if he should go first he'd not leave me anything.)

There's "The Passing of the Ashland Foursome", a whodunnit that I think is clever, though it would never sell because it also violates one of those Medes-and-Persians editorial traditions -- I think it's a better story because it does violate that tradition.

There's "The Lost Road to Paradise", a rather gloomy but I think an effective story of a marriage that should have been a very happy one but that was very sad ~~minutes~~ while it lasted and sadder still in its end and what followed, not because of sin but because of misunderstanding and personal qualities that did not get properly adjusted until too late. *at the final editorial conference*

There's "Fishers of Men" -- Funk & Wagnalls came very near to publishing that one, but decided that there are too few who understand fishing to appreciate that book and make it sell. There are people who do not know a gaff from a seine, nor a Royal Coachman from a helgramite -- isn't it a shame?

There's "Simon Peter -- an Autobiography," supposedly written by Peter in prison, to Theophilus, shortly before the execution of the chief of the apostles. I think it is really worth while, and if you want me to I'll read it to you some day.

There are two or three more book-length manuscripts that have not yet got their full length. There was one about a man who anticipated space ships and astronauts by more than fifty years, and lived on Venus -- and I'm sure you'd like to know some of the wonderful things he learned about the Venusians and told in the manuscript that he wrote while there and put into my hands with a vow required that I would not read it nor let anybody else know of its existence for fifty years -- and then a violent explosion blew him and his interplanetary ship fairly into atoms.

But why go on with books that will never be printed? There are two books of verse that have ~~been printed~~ *published*, "All Kinds of Weather" and "Variable Winds." These are not meteorological treatises but they got their titles because of the wide divergence between one poem and another, even in the same field. "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" is not much like "To B.M.W." or "Love's Pantheism"; "The Side-Hill Gouger" has little resemblance to "Nostalgia" or "Mt. Shasta"; "Mending the Roof" ~~is rather widely different from "The Last Hour."~~ But why mention these? They're all in "All Kinds of Weather", and that volume is sold out. (Don't you wish that you had got a copy while they were obtainable?)

But there are still some copies of "Variable Winds", and you could note the difference between "Jim" and "Just A-Lazin' Around"; between "Preposterous" and "The Trail of the Serpent"; between "The End of the World" and "The Silent Meeting."

I have most of the material ready for a third book of verse, which, if it is ever published, will be "Vagrant Breezes." I can't find the big envelope in which was all this copy, including what I think is the best narrative ~~verse~~ *poem* I ever wrote. I hope I haven't burned all this with the 50,000 to 75,000 letters that I am burning 500 at a time -- don't you join me in that hope?