

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Ruth Poley on 10 Feb. 1946

Levi T. Pennington

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February 10, 1946.

Ruth Poley (Mrs. Irvin C.),
6012 Chew Street,
Germantown,
Philadelphia 38, Penn.

Dear Friend:--

We are home after our "pilgrimage" of nearly 12,000 miles, and find your letter of the 2nd. About your proposed publication of a book of Quaker anecdotes. And you ask me for some -- but you name some conditions that "cramp my style." Most of the stories I know about Quakers, both the ones that I know to be true, the ones that I hope are true, the ones that I fear are apochryphal and the ones that I know are fabricated, do not illustrate Quaker traits. I do know scores of stories about Quakers, but most of them are merely funny. And they would not be the sort you'd want. I've been working for some time on a manuscript which will probably never see the light of day, but it will contain a number of stories about Quakers that do not illustrate Quakerly characteristics, but some of which are funny -- in the enactment if not in the telling.

For instance, there was a pastor of our meeting who once got up from his knees after a long season of prayer, and went to sit down in his chair, but missed it and sat on the floor with a crash. He said, "The Lord knoweth my down-sitting and my uprising. The meeting is dismissed." There was plenty of laughter as that service ended, but that does not illustrate any Quaker trait.

I saw (and heard) one of the funniest things of which I have ever known in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting one time, but so far as I recall it did not illustrate any Quaker trait; and I was told of another of the same general sort that was guaranteed to me as fact, and I ^{was} shown the meeting house where it was said to have happened, but here again there was something a bit un-Quakerly about the incident.

You doubtless know the story of the two Quaker farmers who traded horses. I do not know their names, and you probably do. Friend A. was so pleased with the trade that he decided that he had so much the better of it that he must pay Friend B. \$5.00 to make the matter fair and just. (Five dollars was money in those early days.) So he started to the home of Friend B. to pay him the \$5.00, and half way there he met his neighbor, who said, "Friend A., I am very glad to see thee. The horse thee traded to me is so satisfactory that I feel that I owe thee about \$5.00 to make the trade fair and even." I think that illustrates a Quakerly trait of honesty and fairness.

Another thing in my own experience. A Friend here in Oregon gave his note in 1914 for \$300.00 as a contribution to the Pacific College endowment fund. Soon thereafter, and before

he was able to make payment, he lost everything that he had. He was already a man past middle life, and for years he lived with his children, with an income very near the vanishing point. Of course the note was long ago outlawed, and the college had no legal claim on him at all. But two or three years ago he came to me with \$300.00 that he had saved nickel at a time for nearly or quite 30 years, and paid his note in full. I said to him, "It used to be said that a Quaker's word was as good as his bond; I've found a man whose word is better than his bond. Your note was outlawed long ago, and was legally worthless; you have made your word as good as the face of the note if the note had been legally collectable."

"Well, if I had time I might think of more anecdotes illustrating Quaker traits, but of the many that come to my mind, most of them are merely stories, maybe illustrating qualities that are good but that are not distinctly Quakerly.

With regret that at the moment I cannot do better, and with the hope that if you find that you need more stories after you have exhausted your "first line" sources you will write me again -- maybe at another time I would not be so buried in the piled up correspondence that we found on our return home, in spite of the fact that much of it had followed us, I am

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.