

Levi Pennington

People

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Levi Pennington Writing to Otis, January 8, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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January 8, 1947.

Dear Otis:--

Thanks a lot for that article by Hoover. I had not seen it, though recently I was presented with his latest book, Addresses on the American Road, 1941-46. It came from New York. Yes, I know who was responsible for my getting it. And I had a letter from him since the New Year.

It seems to me that Hoover's article is a pretty sane treatment of a very grave problem. I confess I've never been a thorough-going labor union man. It has always seemed to me that a man ought to have the right to work when he wanted to, and to lay off if he felt that he must, or quit one job for another if that seemed best to him. I suppose the coming of the labor union was inevitable, because of the greed and selfishness of some employers of labor. But when one man can tie up a whole industry and leave the whole country to freeze or starve or go without light or transportation or any other of the necessities of life, we are too near a Hitler-controlled regime to suit me. You can't, in a democratic country, say to half a million men, "You've got to spend your lives working in a coal mine", but it seems to me that the country has a right to say to that half million men, "When you accept year after year a job in a public utility or an industry on which the public is definitely and immediately dependent, you shall not tie up that utility or industry without giving the public a fair chance to protect itself."

Well, what I have to say about such matters won't go far. What Congress and the president say will mean something, for a guess, and they are a lot nearer together now than the former president and I were in such matters. (Wouldn't I like to have a big labor organization tie my hands as president of the United States by giving a half million dollar contribution to my campaign expenses?)

I'm plenty busy these days for a man who has retired and has nothing to do. I helped the New Year to arrive by an address at the Christian Church watch meeting here in Newberg. The next day I raised \$125.00 at our own church New Year's dinner toward a heifer for this Heifers-for-Relief campaign. (We will finish up the \$160.00 to land the bred and tested heifer in some place in Europe or Asia where there is plenty of feed for cattle but where war has left no cattle.) Friday night I attended the meeting of the Yamhill County leaders for this campaign, where I was the principal speaker, as I had been the organizer of the work for our county. Saturday I got off 315 pounds of good used clothing for relief -- Rebecca and I had spent a good part of the previous day sorting and packing it. Sunday evening I occupied the pulpit of our church here. Monday evening I was in Portland at a meeting of a small committee to make plans for united publicity for the many relief agencies of the state. Tuesday, which was yesterday, I just worked at correspondence and packing up things for the Good Will industries and a few things like that. Today I suppose I shall be in the county seat where a wayward son of a good friend of mine 10

in jail awaiting sentence for some burglaries he has committed -- he's less than 18 years old, has diabetes, and is soured on schools, teachers, churches, preachers, law, order, self-control and a lot of other things that seem pretty important to most of us. And tomorrow I am to be in Portland for the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Northwest Institute of International Relations. And so it goes. I'm glad I am retired, so that I do not have anything to do. It's great to rest all the time.

If you were here, we'd go out to the coast and try for steelheads. They have been catching some nice ones lately, although one has had to chose his times. There have been days when the water was too high, and others when it was too low. You see, it sometimes rains out this way, really rains, and the rivers get as muddy as the liberal laws of nature allow, and get out over their banks and overflow the pastures (enriching them materially, incidentally, as a considerable deposit of fertile soil is left when the river recedes). But most of the rivers along the coast are pretty short, and when the rain lets up a bit, they go down and clear up pretty fast. Even when they are low and clear one can catch some steelheads, but the fishing is best when the river is within its banks but not too clear. (That's the usual thing. Sometimes one can make a famous catch when the river is out of its banks and raging and muddy, if a man hits just the right spot where the stream is flowing right over a stretch where Bossie usually feeds or lies down to chew her cud.)

The most exciting time I ever had with a winter steelhead was once when the river was out of bounds and it was raining hard, and a gusty wind was blowing that at times almost pushed you into the stream. It was at the mouth of Three Rivers (a stream with a name much more ambitious than the stream itself.) Usually we drive right down alongside the Big Nestucca River just below the mouth of Three Rivers, where there is a fine, hard gravel bar more than 100 feet long and perhaps half as wide. This time the water was clear out over that bar, to a depth of some two or three feet, for a guess, and we stood on the higher ground with some alder trees along this high bank, Professor (now President) Gulley and myself. It was the only chance we had that entire winter to fish, and though we knew our chances were poor and the weather was not fit for a polar bear to be out, we went, anyhow.

We fished in vain for a considerable time, while the wind blew the rain right through the seams of our water-proof coats and the water began to trickle down inside. Presently I propped my rod up on a forked stick, with Gulley agreeing to take care of it for me while I went a hundred feet or so down the river to talk with the man who owned the farm on which we were fishing.

Perhaps I ought to explain just how this fishing is done. A sinker is fastened to the end of a good, strong casting line, usually about a 20 pound test. Then up the line a foot or more is fastened a good strong hook on a good strong leader from a foot to two feet in length, though some folks use a shorter one. This hook is baited with a gob of salmon eggs, or better still, steelhead eggs. Don't ask me why steelheads will feed on steelhead eggs. Why do some hens eat their

own
outlet
and
sandy
against

own eggs? Why do some cats eat their own kittens? Then this outfit is cast out into the stream as a man casts a bass plug, and the sinker drops to the bottom, and goes bumping along the sandy or gravelly bottom of the river, as the current pulls against the line, the hook with its salmon eggs floating down ahead of the sinker and the line, which are held back by the drag of the sinker on the bottom of the stream. If there is a bit of somewhat stiller water below where the bait is cast in, sometimes the sinker will hold, and the bait lies there on the bottom for the fish to pick up. In that case it is easier to know when you have a fish on sometimes, though at other times he picks it up so quietly that the first knowledge you have that something is doing is the fact that your line seems to be moving off a bit from the line it had been on.

Well, what a long tail our cat has got, as your grandfather used to say. Where Gulley and I were fishing there was a place where the water was still enough so that the sinker would hold, and you could let the bait lie there as you did this "nigger fishing" as they call it. I had propped my rod up on this forked stick and had gone down the river a ways to talk to this man who owned the place, when I heard a yell from Gulley, and rushed back to find --

That a fish had taken my bait and started down stream with it right now, as the southerner would say. And before Gulley could grab the rod, the whole thing went into the boiling muddy water -- good-bye outfit.

There was just one other man fishing along this stretch of river, an old Dutchman who told me what a fool I was, Gulley says a dozen times, but he is such an exaggerater -- I'm sure it was not more than ten or eleven times. You see, I had an old reel, with a click so worn that it would not hold against that current, and I had just taken a turn of the line around the reel, so that a sufficient pull would take out line, but it would hold against that current. It held hard enough so that the rod and reel followed the line into the drink. And the old Dutchman knew I'd never see that outfit again.

But I knew that these fellows do not always run down stream. I had another rod and reel and line with me, and so I rigged that up, in the rain and wind, put on a heavier sinker and a big treble hook, and prepared to do a bit of dragging. But the wind had apparently blown that line, soaked as it was, about the rod, and when I made my big cast to get well across the stream, the line snapped off at the tip of the rod, and the sinker and treble hook went almost across the river and plunked into the swift water along the deep channel next to the north bank. The Dutchman gloated.

I rigged it up again, and this time the cast was good. Slowly I dragged it in along the bottom. Ah, I've picked up a line. Slowly I brought it ashore. Yes, it was my line. I got hold of the line and pulled in carefully, and out of the muddy water came the tip of my rod. I changed end with the rod, reeled in, and finally landed the eight pound steelhead that had given me all this excitement. The Dutchman had nothing to say, and soon left the scene. It is better to be born lucky than rich.

This sort of fishing is not my ideal. Weather is likely to be less than edenic. Often the fishermen build a fire of driftwood to try to keep their hands from freezing. And there is too much time with little or no action -- fly fishing is my ideal. But when the steelheads really are striking, it is great. Once at the mouth of this same Three Rivers, but fishing from the other side of the Big Nestucca into which it flows, I got two steelheads, seven and eight pounds, on two successive casts. But it is only fair to say that ~~there~~ ^{it} was where the only strikes I got all forenoon.

I did not catch a decent fish during 1946. We were out at the coast a bit when the season opened in April, but the streams were all so high and it rained so steadily that we did virtually nothing. I tried deep sea fishing -- for the last time, again -- one day, and feed a lot of fish, but did not get a strike. (Seasickness is one of the three worst jokes in the world, the other two being home-sickness and lumbago.) And in the fall I tried for salmon on two different days, but I did not get a strike.

On one of those days a former pastor here hooked one which gave us some excitement. He had a new reel with a star drag, but he did not have the drag set tight enough, and the fish went wherever it wanted to, which in this case was right into a tangle of willow roots and limbs where a big willow growth had toppled over into the river but with roots enough left in the bank so that it continued to grow. ^(the fish) It played tag with itself in there till the line was hopelessly tangled, and then in trying to untangle it, this man Miller broke the line. He was for putting on another outfit and getting to our trolling again, but I insisted that the fish might still be on, and that anyhow we ought to get the spoon, the steel leader and the spreader. So he and Thomas, the other man in the boat, worked to untangle things while I held the boat alongside the willows and tried to keep it from capsizing as they both worked on one side. They picked up the line with my longest gaff hook, and worked away cutting and pulling out this tangle of willows when suddenly the water down there began to boil. The fish was still on, and after two or three unsuccessful grabs with the gaff hook, Thomas hooked the fish and got it into the boat, a nice silver-side salmon weighing between 15 and 16 pounds. It was the only one we got, but it gave us some excitement.

But I must get ready to go to the Rotary Club luncheon, where a man from the State Game Commission is to speak, unless I find that I must go to McMinnville to be of any help I can in the case of this foolish young fellow who has tangled with the law.

With love from both of us to both of you,

Affectionately your uncle,

Mr. Otis I. Pennington,
Birnawood, Wisconsin.