

Levi Pennington

People

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Levi Pennington Writing to Edwin Sanders, January 13, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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January 13, 1947.

Edwin A. Sanders,
Pacific Oaks Friends School,
714 West California St.,
Pasadena 2, California.

Dear Friend:--

Your letter of the 9th., with the letter from Percy M. Thomas, arrived this afternoon, just after a long session with J. J. Handsaker and two Brethren preachers from Southern Oregon, who wanted to tie me up to a program in Medford, Grants Pass and Ashland on this Heifers-for-Relief campaign. I made no promises, for I had already offered my services without restrictions to this county. But Rebecca's health has not been good for nearly half of the past year, and I myself but recently recovered from a cold contracted while organizing this county for the campaign, and apparently can't stand as much as I once could. I was retired from circulation for two weeks, and spent another far below par.

Having not known of the proposal for a new yearly meeting on the coast until the last day or two, there is little that I could say on the subject that would be of any value, and I suspect that that would be the case if I had known of the proposal from the first time it has been thought of. It is part of the big movement to unite all Friends into one group, which in my judgment will work out in the large as it did in Washington, where they consolidated two meetings into three. The new yearly meeting on the coast will take some from Indiana Yearly Meeting, some from Oregon Yearly Meeting, some from California Yearly Meeting, perhaps some from Canada Yearly Meeting. Perhaps it will include all of the two meetings of the so-called Hicksites and Wilburites in California, though I should doubt that. At any rate it will further emphasize the split that has already existed among the folks who call themselves Friends on the coast, and if widening the breach is a good thing, then perhaps it is well that the meeting be organized.

Percy Thomas is right in holding that not all the intolerance and bigotry is on either one side or the other. The kettle has been calling the pot black for a long time, but the pot has not been silent, either. One side insists in certain interpretations of scripture, on certain forms of Christian experience, a certain form of church organization; the other side insists on a certain different interpretation of scripture, a certain form of worship, certain forms of inclusive organization. Both believe themselves to be right; neither is willing to work with the other whole-heartedly; and so the breach widens.

The feeling of assurance that we are right and anybody who differs must be wrong shows itself in a thousand ways, and under many disguises. Just take an example of this unconscious attitude. Percy Thomas refers to those who "want to worship after the manner of Friends." Yes? What Friends? Do the majority of those who call themselves Friends today worship "on the basis of silence"? No, they do not. Well, those that do not

are not worshipping "after the manner of Friends" -- perhaps they are not Friends. We must either rule them out or say that we do not mean worship after the manner of most Friends today, but we mean after the manner of an earlier day. Very well, we shall consider "the manner of Friends" to be the manner of the early days of Quakerism. They worshipped in silence, more or less. Yes, and they also held great evangelistic meetings, indoors and out of doors; meetings that led to the conversion of thousands. Do the folks who are most insistent on "worshipping after the manner of Friends" follow the customs of those early Friends in that matter? You know the answer.

My guess is, though Percy Thomas would be his best interpreter, is that he had in his mind this attitude on both sides to read out of true Quakerism those who disagree with me and my folks. You know perfectly well that there are plenty of Friends who do not consider Friends who would employ a pastor as really Friends at all. And you know there are plenty of folks who would say that if a man did not believe in the virgin birth, plenary inspiration, the substitutionary atonement, "sanctification as a second definite work of grace subsequent to conversion", etc., he cannot be a Christian, much less a Friend.

Well, what's the use of writing all this to you? I've not told you a thing that you did not know before. Sometimes it makes me actually sick as I think of the energy that has been spent and is still being spent by Quakers in fighting one another. Gurneyite and Wilburite, modernist and fundamentalist, pastoral and non-pastoral. And there is nothing new about it. In the days of my father's youth it was a fight for the enforcement of the discipline and the maintenance of the old ways. My parents were disowned for "marrying out of meeting"; I was once pastor of a meeting where page after page of the old records had to do with "deviation from plainness of dress and address."

The fundamental basis of most of our difficulties these days is doctrinal, rather than anything nearer the surface. A lot of the folks who dislike the term "worship on the basis of silence" recognize the value of silence when it is a natural and not a formal thing. We have a considerable period of silence in every Sunday morning meeting here these days. And some of the things in that connection are humorous, our would be if they were not so serious. In the All-American Friends conference at Oskaloosa some years ago, there were two meetings Sunday morning, one in the church, a regular preaching service, in which there was a considerable period of silence; the other in the college chapel "on the basis of silence", in which there was almost no silence at all, with a whole flock of folks speaking, at least one of them speaking three times. And in Canada Yearly meeting one time, a certain Five Years Meeting Friend had been asked to give a devotional address from 11:30 to 12:00 each day. One day there was some very important and impressive business at the last of the morning session, which ran somewhat past the 11:30 hour, and left the meeting in a deeply devotional spirit. This Friend from across the border, when he was called upon, said that he felt that the company could not do better than to sit in silence and meditate and worship in God's presence. And an English Friend who was visiting got up and spent the entire time and ran clear past the noon hour descanting on

the importance of silence in the meeting for worship. And were you in the All Friends Conference at Swarthmore when in the closing session a number of Friends spoke and again and again some young Friends asked, begged, I almost said screamed for silence?

It isn't merely that we do not agree on the form of worship -- for insistence on a certain period of silence is a form, just as truly as the insistence on the plain bonnet and the broad hat and the plain language became a matter of form on the part of those who had revolted against formalism. Some of our differences come about because we do not understand each other, and some because we understand each other too well. There was a sign in a restaurant where I used to eat, "We can't trust you for two reasons; first, we don't know you; second, we do."

You'll recognize that I am writing purely impromptu, and certainly not for publication nor to be quoted. I am so wrought up over college affairs that I don't know when I shall ever be calm again, if ever. To see the minority of the college board take advantage of the absence of some members of the board and the removal of others to work out their desires, and thus throw away a quarter of a million dollars in one lump, with more to be lost in other quarters -- well, it is not an easy dose to take. It is the culmination of a long train of actions against the college as it has been -- one of the accusations against Gulley was that his administration was just a continuation of mine. One of the members of the college board had heard that I was demanding all my back salary with interest, a matter well over \$8,000.00, and he wrote to me to find out if I had made such a demand. I had to tell him that if he did not know that some folks were much more intent on achieving their ends than they were careful as to their ^{it was times he offered his by} methods, [^] The yearly meeting superintendent for a considerable time carried around with him a statement sworn to before a notary that I had required one of our girl students to serve intoxicating liquor.

I'm not going to say "burn this letter", but I am asking you to consider it a letter from me to you and Marian, and not for publication nor quotation. If I were writing for purposes of publicity, I might not write so freely, and I'd certainly be more careful in my wording.

We are pretty busy folks for people who have retired and have nothing to do. Leaving out what Rebecca has done, and of course she has been a big help in all that I have done, here's what I've been doing in the way of extras in 1947. I helped the New Year in by addressing the annual watch-night service of the Christian Church, and then on New Year's Day we had our New Year's Fellowship dinner, and I raised \$125.00 to apply on the 160 dollars for the purchase of a heifer -- we shall raise the rest of it, for we can't send a mutilated heifer, four fifths of a heifer. (This is in addition to nearly \$3,000.00 raised by the local Friends church here during the year.) Thursday Rebecca and I packed 315 pounds of clothing for relief across the seas. Friday I got this shipped and attended a meeting in McMinnville of the county leaders of the this Heifers-for-Relief campaign -- I am on the executive committee

and was the principal speaker. Saturday I had a heart-breaking interview with a preacher friend of mine whose son had been involved in a number of burglaries and was in the county jail awaiting sentence, as he had entered a plea of guilty. Sunday I attended the morning service, and had charge of the evening service, our pastor beginning a series of evangelistic meetings that night at Springbrook. (I talked on the subject, "How to Meet Temptation" to an audience largely composed of college students, and I hope I did them good.) Monday I had interviews with the sheriff and the district attorney about this preacher's son, and then went to Portland for a meeting of a small committee to plan united publicity for all the relief agencies working to help the sufferers overseas. Thursday I went with this preacher and his wife to McMinnville, where their son appeared for sentence. To my surprise the judge asked me to speak about the case, and when I got through, though I had suggested only some further investigation by the Parole Board, he released the young fellow, on parole for three years, instead of sentencing him to a term of years in the state penitentiary, as he might have done. After I get these three home, I went to Portland for a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Northwest Conference on International Relations. Friday I spoke to ~~the~~ a gathering at the Methodist church. Sunday (yesterday) after we had had our noon meal, Beede and Haworth dropped in on us, and were here till this morning. Beede appears before the federal court tomorrow. After they had gone, Handsaker, Stanley Kellar and another Brethren preacher from Grants Pass (Kellar is in Medford) spent some hours with us. And here I am writing to you, with the clock almost ready to strike ten. I'm going to end this before it can do it if I can.

With love from both of us to all of you,

Sincerely your friend,

Edwin A. Sanders,
Well, since I put all
that at the beginning of the
letter, I guess I can dispense
with it here.