

Levi Pennington

People

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Levi Pennington Writing to Binford & Mort Publishing Company, May 3, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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May 3, 1947.

Binfords & Mort,
102 N. W. Ninth,
Portland, Oregon.

Gentlemen:--

(I almost said "Dear Friends", for I was met on such a friendly basis) if this letter sounds like a salesman's talk, there'll be nothing strange about that. I confess that I'd very much like to have a volume of my verse published, and by you. It would please my wife, it would please my brothers and sisters no end, it would please my friends, it would please me probably more than any of the rest, and it would make a gratifying addition to what Who's Who in America has to say about me in their next edition; and it might, on the long chance that it would sell, lead to other publications.

Of course I know that there's the difficulty, "if it would sell." And since I was asked to suggest where it would sell, I confess that I cannot be sure where it would sell, but I can suggest places where it might sell -- places where I hope it would.

First there are the Quaker circles. It has been my good fortune to be in work that has made me pretty widely known among various circles of Friends. I was a pastor for eight years in Indiana Yearly Meeting, the largest yearly meeting in America, in four different places, in two of those places serving two meetings; and I was called to other than pastoral service in a good many ways. I was head of the Young Friends organization which established, at Winona Lake, the first Young Friends conference in America. I was a frequent speaker at yearly meetings, conferences, bible institutes, etc., and one of the pamphlets which I wrote in connection with one of these had a rather wide circulation as a tract before I came to Oregon. I was a frequent contributor to our church papers, as I still am -- I wrote regularly for one of them every week for years, and recently articles which I have written have appeared in The American Friend, The (so-called "Square") Friend (of Philadelphia), The Friends Intelligencer, etc. I was at one time reading clerk of the Five Years Meeting of Friends in America, and I have been told that I was scheduled for the position of presiding clerk at the next session, but in the meantime Oregon Yearly Meeting seceded from the Five Years Meeting. (My father remarked when this happened, "Levi did not secede.") While Oregon remained a member of the Five Years Meeting, I was the representative of Oregon Yearly Meeting on the Executive Committee of the Five Years Meeting. And when the Forward Movement of Friends in America was organized, I was made its head, and traveled over 80,000 miles in two years, meeting with Friends from coast to coast. I was and still am connected with the American Friends Service Committee, and am a member of the executive committee of the branch that is being formed for Oregon. I was for many years presiding clerk of Oregon Yearly Meeting, a member of the executive committee, and head of its peace department. Perhaps enough of my Quaker connections. I'd hope

that among the thousands who know me personally and the other thousands who have read things that I have written (very little of my verse, for I do not recall that more than two ^{have been published} of the published) things contained in the manuscript which you have there would be a considerable number, both east and west, who would purchase a volume. (I forgot to tell you that I spent a very busy three months in England, speaking as many as four times a day, and becoming personally acquainted with many Friends over there and in Ireland; and that I have raised some \$300,000.00 among Friends in the east for Pacific College, and they must not have felt too unfriendly toward me or they'd not have given like that.)

Well, I'd guess that among Friends would be the largest prospect of sale for a book of my verse; and I am sure that I'd get a good review of the volume in The American Friend at least, and in the others for a guess. Merrill Root, one of the most successful of today's poets and head of the English work at Earlham College, where I was graduated, has written very kind words about my verse; and he is the poetry editor of The American Friend, in which verses by my daughter and my granddaughter are published from time to time.

That suggests a second class of folks some of whom I hope would be interested in a volume of verse by me, and might get so reckless as to buy a copy, and that is the educational circle of my acquaintances and friends. I'd not bank heavily on any results from my public school teaching, though there was some of that which got me some interesting friends. I had to work my way through High School, but I graduated at the head of my class and was valedictorian. I taught for years with Traverse City, where I graduated, as the center; then I went into newspaper work, where I worked up to city editor of a daily paper, in which I was assured that I could buy a financial interest if I desired, but I went to preaching about that time, and left the newspaper field, coming from the pastoral work in Indiana to the presidency of the college here. As you know, I was president of Pacific College for thirty years, and am now president emeritus. I was repeatedly head of the Association of Independent Colleges of Oregon, a speaker at teachers institutes, schools and colleges, giving commencement addresses in dozens of High Schools, and I was one of the speakers at the National Education Association convention the time it was held in Portland. I have spoken at the University (from which I hold a master's degree), and if they had not gone out of commercial printing, it is likely that I should have had a volume of verse issued by them before this. I have been repeatedly a speaker at assemblies of Oregon State College, and have spoken at Reed, Pacific University, Linfield, Willamette, Portland University, Albany (now Lewis & Clark), Marylhurst, etc. And of course the place where one would expect most interest in my work would be among the faculty, former faculty, alumni and former students of the college. (I taught Shakespeare, contemporary novel, contemporary poetry and other English in the college for years, and was once asked to consider a place on the English faculty of the University, but I declined to consider it, as I felt my duty still to be with Pacific College, and so the matter never became official.)

Well, that educational field is a second one in which I should hope there might be some sale of my book of verse if

There are other circles where I am somewhat known. I mentioned the religious press (for I have written for other religious periodicals than those of Friends, such publications as The Homiletic Review, The Christian Standard, the old Ram's Horn, and others.) I have written other things, short stories for the most part -- one of them is in the Harvard Junior Classics, though it was written a long time ago and for boys. It was first published in the old Youth's Companion.) And I have read some of my verse to groups of people who were interested, though I confess that that has not been extensive.

I have a pretty wide acquaintance through such organizations as the Northwest Institute of International Relations, the National Council for Prevention of War, of which I am one of the vice presidents, the American Friends Service Committee, the Oregon Council of Churches, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, of which I was one of the Charter Associates, the Hoover Foundation, of which I am a member of the Executive Committee, and so on, and on, and on.

Well, you do not need to tell me that most of the folks who know me will not buy copies of any book that I might have published. I know that; if I thought that one in ten of them would, or one in twenty, I'd issue the book at my own expense and make some money out of it.

You have issued numerous books by Ben Hur Lampman. He and I are good friends, by correspondence, and he might give you an opinion as to the quality of my verse. (There is a possibility that I might want to include more than the verses I have submitted to you.) I doubt if Mr. Lampman has read any of my verse at all. He was highly pleased, apparently, with "Salvelinus Fontinalis -- A Rhapsody", a sort of essay or something that I once wrote about the eastern brook trout.

I mentioned my friend Merrill Root. He recommended a literary critic and agent in another state, who is anxious to have me let a firm which she recommended put out this book for me. I'd lots rather have your firm do it, though they promise all sorts of publicity, handling of sales, etc.

I have a number of book-length manuscripts in prose, a plain novel, a "whodunnit", a religious book, "Fishers of Men", and the first draft of an "autobiography" of Simon Peter, which I have read to a number of friends in Newberg, and which they seemed to appreciate greatly. But the thing I am most interested in these days is getting some of my verses into book form. I hope you may see your way clear to putting out the book on some sort of basis that will not lose you any money, even if it does not make any for me.

Some day I shall call at the office again unless I hear from you with instructions that I must not show my face there. I might be in town tomorrow, for I broke my spectacles this morning, or found them broken, rather, and I'm pretty helpless without them. I may be able to get them fixed here so that I'll not have to visit Portland till a bit later.

Sincerely and hopefully yours,

Levi T. Pennington.