

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Richard Wood, October 2, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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13 Marion Avenue, South Glens Falls, N.Y.,
October 2, 1947.

Richard Wood,
304 Arch St.,
Philadelphia 6, Penn.

Dear Friend:--

Let me thank you for your card of September 22, which has just reached me here, where I am visiting for a few days with my daughter and her husband, after attending the Workers Conference of New York Yearly Meeting.

I have no quarrel with the meeting for worship that is held on the basis of spiritual guidance. Though most of my life has been spent in so called "pastoral" meetings, I have been glad to be in meetings in Philadelphia, in some of which I did not speak a word -- and had Philadelphia Friends tell me afterward that they wished I had. And when a western Friend attends a meeting in the east and the man who sits at the head of the meeting says, as he seats the western Friend alongside of him, "If thee feels led to speak in this meeting we trust that they will feel free to do so, and we hope thee'll be led", some western Friends feel that that is not very far from "programming" a meeting, at least to the extent of asking some man to be a speaker.

It was a revelation to me to be in a certain meeting in England, where they had a men's adult school Sunday morning with an enrollment into the hundreds, in which all sorts of things were studied, Shakespeare, mechanical drawing, history of England and what not; a Sunday school of hundreds for non-Friends far more than for Friends; an evening meeting Sunday with a printed program, including the numbers of all hymns to be sung, the name of the speaker and his subject, and the whole thing tabulated from the opening hymn to the benediction; an adult school for women numbering hundreds; an institutionalized church, with all sorts of activities social and athletic and what not; and at one time on Sunday to sit in a group of Friends numbering much less than fifty, where we sat in a circle with no program, no appointed leader, and very much of the time spent in silence. There seemed to be the power-house for the whole enterprise.

What I object to, among other things, is the "programmed" meeting where there is no chance for participation except by designated folks, or an "unprogrammed" meeting where silence is so definitely programmed as to make it almost a ritual -- and I'm sure I've been in meetings where one could have omitted the "almost."

But here I'm talking far too much. I did not want to stir up controversy. I only wanted to see if I could say something that would help us to see to it that our meetings, as Fox or Penn said, are "held in the power of God."

Sincerely your friend,