
Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Charles Haworth, December 13, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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December 13, 1947.

Dear Friend:--

Your letter of the 2nd. arrived while I was having a bout with the flu. I was out of the house for the first time yesterday, at the inauguration of President Carey, who himself had been out of bed only a day or two, after a flu attack.

Wish I could give your letter the sort of reply that it deserves, but I know I shall not be able to do it.

What a pleasant trip that one must have been which you took to Calexico and Mexicali. You'd get a lot more out of it than we would, for we do not speak Spanish. The only time we have been across the border to the south was on our return early last year from our long trip east. We went over the Rio Grande at El Paso, and we did not find it such a Grande Rio as we had expected. And while my guess is that Juarez is not the best part of Mexico, being too much infected with some of the worse influences of the United States, still I do not think I should like to live under the Mexican flag.

Wish you were here where I could consult you on a matter which comes to me by letter from a Mexican prison. I am offered \$133,000.00 if I'll help a man to get his trunk, which he claims is in an ~~American~~ ^{new} port and which he says contains three times that sum and more. It all looks plenty crooked to me, and I'll not be appearing in Mexico with the required \$8,300.00 that it will take to get things going. There are a lot of Mexican official looking papers, with seals and all that, included in the last letter, which urges me to hurry, since the whole thing must be completed the day before Christmas. If I had \$8,300.00 and all expenses above that, I'd not make the trip on present information, since it looks as if I'd be involved in some lawbreaking myself.

Gervas A. Carey was up from an attack of the flu only a day or two before his inauguration ceremony. I had been up a bit on Monday, and gaining every day thereafter. I am enclosing copy of the program, which did not last as long as would have been natural to expect in view of the two pages of printing. Most of the speakers used discretion and had good terminal facilities. My own speech, which I had written and which I read -- I wanted to say the right things and to be able to prove just what I said if there were ever a question, was only fifteen minutes long. Dr. Carey's was longer, but not a bit too long. The program went very happily, with a reception following the ceremonies, and a banquet in the evening, with the members of the board and faculty and their wives and husbands staying for an informal and unarranged program, the college choir and quartet and Prof. Bulgin singing, and with each member of the board and faculty introducing himself and his wife (except in those rare cases like that of Mrs. Calkins where it was the wife who was "on the job." Joseph G. Reece made the same speech I have heard him make a time or two before, telling how he was reared in a Quaker home, attended a Quaker training school, graduated from a Quaker college, but still knew next to nothing about the peculiar testimonies of Friends. I can't understand how all that could have been, but

**As I see I've said before*

he insisted that it was, and made a plea for genuine Quaker education, especially for our ministers, but also for all our young Friends. Well, Pacific College has always, so far as I know, tried to give Quaker training. We sent more of our men and women proportionally into war relief than any other college in the world, we had a larger proportion of C.P.S. men in camp than most of the colleges, and there is other evidence that our peace testimony, at least, had got across to some of our folks. I must confess that the showing for the sons of Oregon Yearly Meeting pastors was not impressive -- I have been told that not one son of one of our pastors took the position of the conscientious objector. I've not checked to be sure of that, but the man who told me stated it as a fact.

I suppose you saw my article, "On the Basis of Silence" in at least two of our American Friends papers -- I am not sure whether the American Friend used it or not. You may conclude from that that I do not understand the movement for its revival -- the revival, that is, of "meetings on the basis of silence", a term which I do not at all like, for reasons which the article suggested, at least. There is something exceptionally fine in the silence that is not "artificially inspired", the "living silence" of which many Friends of each generation know. But to insist that only in silence is true worship possible, and to make a fetish and a ritual out of silence seems to me as far from real Quakerism as is the "pumped up" enthusiasm of the meeting where any half minute without vocal expression of some sort is considered "dead." There is such a thing as a "dead" silence in a Quaker meeting, just as there may be a lot of noise that is nothing else but. I have tried to insist that a meeting for worship should not be "on the basis of silence" nor "on the basis of noise", but one the basis of the leadership of the Holy Spirit, whether in silence or in speech.

Yes, I recall the original action of the yearly meeting, taken in our absence in 1942, by which the effort was made to get rid by indirection of Robert H. Dann, Sceva B. Laughlin and others, and of the subsequent action leading up to the expulsion from the Ministry of Robert Dann and the giving to Sceva Laughlin of an official O.K. of Oregon Meeting on Ministry and Oversight not possessed by Edward Mott, Gervas Carey, Levi T. Pennington, or even Charles C. Haworth. Well, Sceva has gone "to his long home", Robert I suppose is now a member of the new Pacific Coast Yearly Meeting, and everybody is happy (?). I've never been favorable to the idea of dual membership, even if some prominent Friends not only favor it but practice it. (You know of the man who was approached by a member of the Dunkards who asked him if he believed in foot-washing, and the man replied, "I not only believe in it, but I practice it.")

Just why young Friends who come under the influence of the "silent meeting" absent themselves from the regular meetings of the church I am sure would require an answer that would not be simple. And I do not know the answer, but I have some ideas on the subject.

In the first place, they discover some of the good of the silent meeting which many of our meetings, perhaps most of those west of the Atlantic Coast and still more emphatically those west of the Mississippi, and perhaps still more those

west of the Rocky Mountains have lost, if we ever had it, which in many cases would be doubtful. Just as is likely to be the case when a good thing is discovered, it gets more emphasis than it really deserves. If one were to try to prescribe as well as to diagnose, my suggestion would be that we seek to secure the advantage of the silent meeting without antagonizing anybody, and at the same time hold our folks all to the main work of the church.

A second reason for these folks absenting themselves from the main meetings of the church lies in the poverty of many of these services, often emotionally, still more frequently intellectually. Friends always have had some of the ablest preachers in the world. But they also have always had some of the poorest. This has grown partly out of a misinterpretation of one of George Fox's statements, that Oxford or Cambridge could not make a minister. It's as true today as it was then that education cannot make a minister; but it is as true now as then that education can make a minister better than he could possibly be if he were not educated. To minister to the bodies of men, we require that a man have a high school and college education, with a four years course of medical study and a two years internship -- at least that is the regular course for the regular physician. But many have thought that a good Christian experience and a desire to advance the Kingdom of God is all that is required to make a man a minister; which is like saying that having good health and wanting to help folks constitute the requirements for being a physician.

Many of our preachers are pitifully lacking in intellectual capacity or training. They do not have either the matter or the skill to feed the mind of man -- and we are enjoined to love the Lord with all our mind as well as with all our hearts. You and I have both heard sermons of half an hour's length which did not contain five minutes worth of real food, mental or spiritual. You know the story of the man who came to a certain Quaker quarterly meeting and gave a long talk in the morning session on the inadequacy of the support of the pastors of that yearly meeting, the average being little more than \$300.00 per year at that time. During the intermission between the meeting for worship in the morning and the afternoon business session, some of the members were talking about the morning "message" and one old farmer of the group said, "Yes, I heerd what the preacher said, an' lookin' at it one way, it seems like \$300.00 a year is mighty poor preacher pay. But I've been around the yearly meetin' a good deal, an' I've heerd a lot of the preachin' and in my judgment at \$300.00 a year, it comes high."

Well, the poverty of our church services is one reason for non-attendance, not only of the folks who have come under the influence of the "silent meeting" but of a lot of others. Not only in the matter of preaching, but in the matter of music, care for details of many sorts, real friendliness of the membership, and such things, do we fall short of what our meetings might be to make them more attractive, in the best sense of that word.

Another thing which I think tends to alienate some of our young people is an overemphasis on dogmatic statements of

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theological doctrines. Some of our preachers get "wise above that which is written." There is little of the humility of the Apostle Paul, who could say, "and I think I have the mind of Christ." A man can speak what he knows, but when he gets too sure of his interpretation of what it may be impossible to interpret fully, he is on dangerous ground. "If a man does not have the belief that the story of Jonah is a historical statement of actual fact, he cannot have faith enough in Christ to be saved" was a statement that I heard once in a meeting of the ministers of Oregon Yearly Meeting, and the speaker was heartily "amened" for it. "Repent and believe on Jonah and the whale" is not the way I read my bible. "If I should find that the bible taught organic evolution, I'd throw away my bible and not believe any of it" was a statement made to Pacific College students. "I'm not an animal" was the statement made in a Pacific College commencement address. And one could multiply cases where statements are made dogmatically which many educated young people find it impossible to accept, and which they are told that they must accept or be damned. Such preaching inevitably drives some folks away from the church.

My guess is that most of the difficulty is, as you suggest, deeper than anything that I have mentioned, unless it is this last. Unquestionably there is much laxness on the part of some of our members in their attitude toward the bible, just as there is a fetish-worship of the book on the part of others. "I believe every word in the bible, from cover to cover" is usually accompanied by some real or metaphorical pounding on the pulpit. You know the story of the man who was defending a client of his in court, and who said, "On the highest authority we are assured that 'All that a man hath will he give for his life.'" The opposing counsel stated that he was glad to know what his opponent considered the highest authority, and reminded him that that statement, which the whole book of Job and much other evidence proved to be a lie, was spoke by Satan. Over against the fetish-worship of the book is a tendency to reduce it to a purely human set of documents, with no real authority, any more than that of any other book of real moral and spiritual value.

Perhaps you were not present when one of Oregon Yearly Meeting's pastors was making things all clear (?) to a group of young people and others who were listening to him. He started with God, perfectly good, and of course with no tendency to evil in any way. This perfectly good God created perfectly good angels, who had in them nothing to respond to evil if there had been any evil in the universe, which of course there was not, for God had not created anything evil, and could not, in the very nature of God. Then, by some process which he failed to make clear to me, this preacher stated that this perfectly good angel, with no tendency to evil if there had been any evil, which there was not, became a perfectly bad devil, and tempted man, to the latter's inevitable destruction. Well, believe it or not, there were young people in that group who did not believe that the bible teaches quite all of that, and if it did, they would think that the teaching was merely some human being's attempt to clear up what he knew of life and what he believed of God.

If I were guessing, and I, too, would avoid misjudging, I'd guess that the real reason for any falling off from all that we ought to be, young people as well as older ones, is a shrinking

back from complete obedience to all that God requires. "He that turneth back ... is not fit for the kingdom." My guess is that the claims of Christ to complete surrender of heart and life do get more emphasis in most of our meetings than they do in most of the "silent meetings", though my guess is that in the genuine "living silence" God can speak more clearly than He is usually able to speak through human lips.

There is one more phase of the matter which I think is a large feature of the difference between two elements of the Friends church. Youth, especially, desires and requires action. There have been many churches, Friends among others, where the whole requirement seemed to be attendance at and participation in meetings of one sort and another, and some slight contribution of a financial nature, the latter not insisted upon. Well, good as all that is, it is not enough for young people who really want to be doing things. The response to appeals for help in war relief service, service to the interned Japanese, service in labor camps and all that sort of thing seems to me to indicate that the church has lost much by not furnishing tangible projects in which young people can engage, using hands as well as heart and brains.

But surely I've talked on paper long enough. Anyhow, it is now Sunday morning while I write this last paragraph, and I must do the things that are to be done before we leave for the morning meeting.

With love from both of us to both of you,

Sincerely your friend,

Charles C. Haworth,
2271 North Beechwood Drive,
Hollywood 28, California.

The misdeeds of one man or set of men is no adequate excuse for the misdeeds of another man or set of men, but wrong very often does

result in other wrong. I did not mention such things as genuine hypocrisy, falsehood, crooked politics, and such things, which I consider wicked. The history of Oregon Yearly Meeting, as of other yearly meetings, is one of the things which drive folks away. One could be specific. How can one expect loyalty to the church from the children of Emmett Gulley, in view of all that he has gone through? How can one expect enthusiastic support from the daughter of Robert Dann, Sceva Laughlin, and a lot of others that we could name. Oregon Yearly Meeting violated its promise to Indiana Yearly Meeting, and decades afterward had to ask Indiana's forgiveness. I have heard two leaders in the evangelistic and church extension board give each other the lie, both of them pastors and both aspirants for the position of yearly meeting superintendent. Opposition to the Five Years Meeting was largely on the basis of falsehood and misrepresentation, actual lies being told about people who were candidates for the foreign mission field and others who were leaders in the work of the Five Years Meeting. Who would expect the sons of B. Willis Beede to feel good about the church in view of all that was done to their father? You perhaps know that the yearly

superintendent carried about with him a statement, sworn to before a notary, that I had required a girl student of Pacific College to serve intoxicating liquor. And one might mention many things, and in high places, which would not have been a credit to Tammany Hall. Uncharitable, unchristian, dishonest acts on the part of those who claim about everything in the catalogue of Christian graces and experience are an alienating influence, perhaps the strongest of all. But one does not need to dwell on such things to you. Nobody that I know is clearer of any such offenses than you; I know of nobody who would be in more definite opposition to them.