

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Clarence Robinett, February 26, 1948

Levi T. Pennington

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February 26, 1948.

Clarence M. Robinett,
Drain, Oregon.

Dear Mr. Robinett:--

Your letter of the 20th. came to me just as I was coming down with a cold, from which I am now partially recovered, so that I am able to reply to it in part.

Your first question is not easy to answer. I suppose you mean to ask what teacher in the schools benefited me most. My parents were my best teachers, but you doubtless refer to school teachers.

And there the question is not easy to answer. They say that comparisons are odious, and it is not easy to make a selection among all the fine teachers I have had. Even narrowing it down to the one who has benefited me most does not get it settled in my own mind. I'd have to name three, which would not do you any good. Which benefited me most I do not know.

First I'd have to name Carrie M. Travis, who later married a man named Pierce. She was only a high school girl when she came to the little school near the head of Long Lake, commonly called the Coffield School, to teach. She taught me self control, not merely by precept but by example. When we set a task for the day (I was the only one in my class most of the time) we finished it that day, and if we did not get it done by four o'clock, the regular time for closing, we stayed and completed it, not as a matter of punishment but just to do the day's work that day. One Friday evening her "boy friend" had hired a horse and buggy from the livery stable and had driven out to take her back to the town where she lived when school closed. But the work for the day was not completed, and she kept the young man waiting out in the buggy while we finished it, though I knew then and know better now how much she wanted to get out and start on that drive to town. We all sat in double seats, and I was in the seat with my best friend, Fred Clough. She had told us at the start of things that whispering, except about school matters, was unnecessary and undesirable. If we wanted to speak to a seatmate or some other student about a lesson, all we had to do was to hold up a hand and get permission. She had so inspired me with her own spirit of doing the right thing in the school room that for the whole term I did not whisper to Fred a single time without permission. On the "last day of school", which was always a day of celebration, she told us that that rule would be relaxed, and we could whisper if we pleased. But so thoroughly had she got me committed to the idea of doing the thing as it ought to be done and controlling myself that I did not take advantage of the permission to whisper, and I did not whisper to Fred on the "last day of school" either. One of the prized possessions of this man in his seventies is a picture given me at the close of that school term, inscribed in that girl's neat handwriting, "A Faithful Boy."

That was the boy of ten, in the little country one-room school -- I visited the place last fall, and saw how very tiny is the school house, still standing, and the school yard where the big boys could knock a ball clear across the road -- I've since thrown the discus farther than the entire length of the school grounds, I believe.

I must have had good teachers, for I did not get to start my schooling until I was past eight years of age, and I think we never had more than six or eight months of school in a year, and sometimes less; but at the age of twelve when we moved to Lone Tree I entered the school in Traverse City, and was put in the last term of the seventh grade, by the second teacher I'd have to mention, Charles T. Grawn, superintendent of schools, who more than any other man made the school system of that growing northern Michigan town. I was under him from the seventh grade through High School, not in many of the classes that he actually taught, but constantly under his eye and his inspiration.

Our family were poor, and because we lived outside the Traverse City school district, I had to pay tuition -- \$1.20 a month, believe it or not. But in those days \$1.25 for a ten hour day was the usual wages for a laborer, and the man who got \$1.50 a day was in a fine job and getting big pay. Repeatedly I'd have to drop out of school and work for a few days, to pay some back tuition and get myself a new pair of pants and maybe a long needed hair-cut. Always "Professor" Grawn was patient and understanding, encouraging and stimulating. And it was he more than any other teacher who opened to me a vision of the world and aroused in me a hope, I may say a consciousness, that I could do something in that world that would be of real consequence. It was he who proposed that some of us take Latin as a part of the "College preparatory" course, and Latin was just exactly an extra in that first year of High School -- we who took the college preparatory course carried all that the rest did, and Latin besides. It was "Professor" Grawn who definitely headed me in the direction of college, the teaching profession, service to mankind, a confidence that I could be of some service to humanity.

I was working myself through High School, and while I could live at home and attend school with only a two mile walk night and morning I got along well. But when my father accepted the pastorate of a little church in Manton, 35 miles away, I was thrown still more "on my own", and at Christmas time in my Junior year funds had all run out, I simply could not make a go of it there, and so I went to Manton to live with the home folks, and entered the Manton High School, under Louis N. Tupper, who had just come from his college graduation to head the schools there.

The Manton High School was not so far advanced as was the High School at Traverse City. I wished to graduate at the end of that school year if I could. It would mean that I must carry seven studies, General History, Physics, Geometry, English Literature, Rhetoric, Book Keeping -- why can't I remember the seventh? I had to make up Roman History outside of school; had to do three terms work in English Literature in two terms; had to do in two terms the work in Plane and Solid

Geometry that the only other member of the Senior class did in four terms; and had to do some outside work in Physics. The Book Keeping work was easy, but took a good deal of time.

Well, it was Louis N. Tupper who met my desire to do all that work in two three months terms with sympathy and understanding; it was he who gave me the chance to try it, and the promise, fulfilled abundantly, that he would help me in every way he could. It was he who taught me to work. I had never taken a book home during my High School work thus far. Now I was in recitations nearly all day, and did my studying at night. It was Louis N. Tupper who encouraged me to play hard for a part of each day, and work hard when I worked. In addition to his fine example of what a man ought to be, which was an inspiration always, and still is, he taught me to work. It may be that I have overdone it sometimes since. For a time as president of Pacific College I was teaching 23 hours a week, serving as president of the college, doing all the college correspondence on my own typewriter (more than once I worked at the college all day and spent the night writing letters and then worked at the college the next day), carrying on an endowment campaign and doing almost all the solicitation myself, and preaching and giving addresses nearly every week end. I really worked -- and it was Louis N. Tupper who more than anybody else got me into the habit of working when nothing but hard work would meet the situation.

well, I'm sure that is not the sort of thing you wanted. But I'm so constituted that I could not tell you which, even in my poor judgment, benefited me most, Carrie M. Travis, Charles T. Grawn or Louis N. Tupper, but the three of them stand out above all the rest of the many fine teachers I have had, from primary school in the country to graduate school in the University of Oregon.

On your second question, "What does Christ mean to me", one could write a book. I could say part of it thus:

1. He is my Savior. I needed to be saved from sin, from habits that I could not break myself, from a temper that could easily have made me a killer, from the guilt that blackened every joy. I met Him whose name was called Jesus because He saves from sin, and found salvation.

2. He is my Teacher. More and more as the years have passed I have learned that He "has the words of eternal life" not only, but that His teaching is what the world needs, and obeying that teaching would solve the world's problems and alleviate or entirely cure its evils. All the suffering that comes from the war of race against race, class against class, nation against nation, as well as the wars between individuals and the war in a man's own soul, would be cured if His teaching was obeyed.

3. He is my Example. "I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done than be one of the twenty to follow my own teaching" said Portia. But here was One who never gave a teaching that He himself did not follow, never directed to a path where He Himself did not lead. When He told His followers to be pure, He showed them purity; when he told them to serve humanity, He showed them the life of one who "came not to be ministered unto but to minister"; when He told them to be courageous, He showed them a Leader who "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

4. He is my Master, Lord, King. What He commands I am under obligation to do, whatever the cost to me.

5. He is my Helper, my Comfort, my Elder Brother. "Lo, I am with you always" means that I can do the things he requires, carry any load He lays upon me, bear any sorrow or hardship that He gives or permits.

It would be easy to go on, but this is probably much too much already.

If any or all of what I have written can be of any help to you, I shall be glad indeed.

Sincerely yours,

Levi T. Pennington.