

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Helene Stern, March 22, 1948

Levi T. Pennington

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March 22, 1948.

Mme. Helene Stern,
11 rue Scribe,
Paris, France.

Dear Madam:--

My wife has asked me to reply to your undated letter, which she has just received, a thing that it is not at all easy to do.

Our hearts ache for the suffering in your country and in many another, and we are trying to do what we can to relieve the distress of those who are in misery through no fault of their own. My wife is chairman of the local Friends committee which has sent tons of clothing overseas; we have raised thousands of dollars for relief in our own church and have headed two community campaigns that have raised other thousands; we both work through the American Friends Service Committee; I am vice president of the Heifers-for-Relief organization which has sent tens of thousands of dollars worth of heifers and goats to places where they were most needed; I worked in connection with the recent Christmas Ship which took hundreds of tons of food and clothing to Europe; and in other ways we are trying to help those who need help across the water.

And it would, of course, be an exceptional pleasure if we could know just who were receiving our help; and while it would not be given for that purpose, the expressions of their personal appreciation would be gratifying.

But in the face of all this, we do not feel that we can with justice grant appeals like yours, and for a number of reasons that seem potent to us.

First, the sending of individual packages to individuals is not an economical way to provide food for people in Europe. A dollar will get a much larger amount of food into hungry mouths over there if given to some organization that buys wholesale, ships wholesale, gets just the food that is needed for any given community, etc. Such an agency is the American Friends Service Committee, with which we have been associated ever since the first world war.

Second, we are eager to have what we can give go to the places where it is most needed, and we here have no way of knowing where these places are. It may be Paris, though we are inclined to believe that bad as conditions are there, other places in other countries are still more needy.

Third, and this is a hard thing to say, we do not know you, nor have we any way of knowing whether all you say is true or whether, if we knew the actual situation, we would be unwilling to send you anything with others so much more needy than yourself. We'd like to believe every word you have written, and if it were possible to visit you, we might be eager to help you.

What you may or may not know, is that there are many people in your own country and in others, who are clever enough and unscrupulous enough to secure the names of many Americans to whom they write letters of appeal like yours, some of which are very far from the truth. There are those who thus are getting from America supplies that enable them to fare far better than their neighbors, even enough to put some of it on the black market. The American Friends Service Committee, while it cannot investigate all such letters of appeal, have investigated many of them, and they find that in four cases out of five the appeals are made by those who are better off than their neighbors, and instead of being the neediest are the least needy and the best supplied of any in their neighborhood.

You will understand that I am not charging you with anything of this kind, though I confess that your letter looks a bit as if it were prepared to send to many different people, it was undated, and my wife does not recall putting into any of our shipments a dress with any note from her attached to it. But knowing what we do about such matters, we feel that we must confine our gifts to organizations that we know, that make thorough investigation of all cases which they assist, that make a dollar go much farther in actual relief than it would if invested in individual packages, and that give on the basis of actual need, without regard to race, religion, nationality or any other consideration except that of need.

With regret that we cannot answer your appeal favorably, I am, on behalf of Mrs. Pennington,

Levi T. Pennington.