

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Lloyd Baker, April 22, 1948

Levi T. Pennington

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April 22, 1948.

Mr. Lloyd B. Baker,
Oregon State Hospital,
Salem, Oregon. -

Dear Friend:--

Both Rebecca and I remember with much pleasure our recent visit to you, and we were delighted with the improvement you have made toward the complete recovery that is ahead. And we were not only pleased by what we could see as evidences of your gain, but with what your physician told us of your condition and your progress.

I've seen some exploits in athletics in my time. I saw two sprinters, both of whom had equalled the recognized world's record in the 100 yard dash, run a race in which one of them won, again in world record time. I saw Ben Grave set a world's record in the standing hop-step-and-jump, now no longer included in track meets. I have seen some of the greatest base ball players in the world, Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Lefty Grove, Tris Speaker, Napoleon Lajoie, and others. I've seen Bob Fitzsimmons, a real middleweight who held the world's heavy-weight championship in pugilism. And so on I might go, for I have been around a lot and have had an interest in athletics of all sorts. But I know a thing in the physical world, which of course is related to the mental world just as these other achievements are, which is harder than any of these things, and that is the ability to relax. If I were going to guess, I'd guess that that is not easy for either of us to do. I had to learn it, or I don't think I'd ever have gone as far as I have. In the days when I was teaching 23 hours a week, trying to carry on the work of the president of the college, with an endowment campaign in which I did nearly all the solicitation, doing all the college correspondence on my own typewriter (the college did not own a machine, and I did not have a secretary for a good many years), sometimes working all day, then sitting up all night to catch up with the correspondence and working all the next day, with sermons and addresses nearly every week end -- well, I had to learn when any given part of the job was done to just relax, go limp, physically and mentally and spiritually, and take it easy till the next part of the job turned and had to be done. I learned to nap between two appointments, if they were only fifteen minutes apart. I learned to forget all about things when I went to bed, go to sleep, and wake up the next morning ready for another go at it. up

Well, I hope you do not have any trouble these days about sleeping, and that if you needed to learn to relax, you have learned it so well that you could even show me some fine points about it; though I confess that it would be like "teaching your grandmother to knit", for I'm a good deal of an expert on this relaxation business.

I really had learned a good deal about it while I was a student in college. I don't know how much you know about that. I took my degree after being in college only three years,

carrying as much as 23 hours at a time, and serving as pastor of a church all the time in another town, so that I got up at 5:00 o'clock Monday morning, took the 5:45 interurban to the college, worked there until my last class Friday, then rushed back home, to make pastoral calls with Rebecca till night, lead the weekly prayer meeting, which had been moved to Friday evening so I could lead it, spent Saturday making calls till we'd almost drag our tracks out, taught a business men's bible class and then preached Sunday morning, often had something special Sunday afternoon, then attended the C.E. meeting and then preached at the evening service, to be up again the next morning and off to college. I really worked; but from my last class of the day, or at any rate from 4:00 to 6:00 every day, my mind was as clear of study and worry as soccer or tennis or basket ball could make it. One of the professors, after watching me play my head off in a soccer game (I was captain and center forward of our team, and we won the game) said to me as we walked off the field together, "I think I now know how you do it." "Do what?" I asked him. "Carry all the work you do, and still keep up", he said. "Well", I said, "how do you think I do it?" He replied, "You play just as hard as you work." Well, that was my way of relaxing then. (I could not do it that way now, with my bum legs. But I have to do it now, as I did then, for though I am no longer tied to a desk and a time schedule, I am plenty busy. My brother says he wishes that I were not so "actively retired.")

Well, what a long tale about relaxing. I did not mean to spoil so much paper talking about it. But if ever you need to relax, I hope you'll think of it not as a weakening but as an accomplishment, an achievement that is harder and often far more useful than effort and struggle. A man can do more about getting strength to leap over an obstacle by relaxation than he ever can by seeking to lift himself over by his bootstraps. There is a law in the physical world which says that this lift-yourself can't be done. A man must take hold of something above himself to lift himself -- that's faith in God. And with that he must develop something within himself, and that can't be done merely by struggle and effort; there must be relaxation. And you've real reason to feel willing to relax and take it easy, for your doctor is taking the kind of interest in you that he'd take if you were his much loved brother, and there are a lot of folks I know and could name who are holding to God in prayer for you. You've got a lot of forces working in your behalf. No wonder you are getting better.

While I was writing about my experiences at Earlham College, I remembered an incident that I still think of with a smile. A bunch of us were in the parlor of the men's dormitory singing at the top of our lungs a song that was a favorite among college men of those days, the chorus of which goes like this:

"Father and Mother pay all the bills
 And we have all the fun
 Of the friendly rivalry of college life. Hurray!
 We have to figure an awful lot
 To tell them what we've done
 With the money that we spend for college life."

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Well, one of the professors who had dropped in for a few minutes had listened to our singing with a smile, and as the

hell rang for the end of idleness and noise and the beginning of study, I walked out with him and said to him, "What were you smiling about as we were singing that last song?" He replied, "The contrast between the song and the facts amused me. You fellows were yelling that Father and Mother were paying all the bills, and I looked you over. There was Conrad, the greatest track athlete in America, paying his own way by handling the college laundry. There was Comstock, paying his way by running his own private pressing shop in one of the basement rooms. There were "Judge" and "Bush" Haworth, making their college expenses by janitor work. There you were, serving as pastor of a church. There was Bond, doing the same thing. Yet you were all yelling that Father and Mother paid all the bills -- it was enough to make a man laugh." Ah, well. The thing that does not cost much is often but little valued. The fellows who had to pay most for our education, as well as all others who realize what it costs, are likely to make the best use of it. Every one of the fellows that Professor named is doing a good job in the world, with the possible exception to the one named next to the last. Bond is pastor of a church, after years as head of White's Institute, an institute for dependent and delinquent children. Conrad is doing a good job as a college teacher. Comstock has gone far in the business world. "Judge" Haworth is superintendent of schools in North Carolina. And "Bush" Haworth, after pulling the Philadelphia Y.M.C.A. out of an indebtedness of \$5,000,000.00, has taken the job of raising a \$10,000,000.00 sum for post-war Y.M.C.A. rehabilitation throughout the world -- and I was told that he is ahead of schedule now, with more than half the sum raised and less than half the time set for it passed.

What a lot of inconsequential stuff my fingers write when I start them and then go off and leave them. But there is one more thing I want to tell you before I end this long "epistle." I think you know that three years ago this month I got up after five months in bed with polyneuritis, with pain all of that five months, intense pain a good share of it, and positive torture for so much of it that I was not the only one who wondered just how much more of it I could stand. Well, along toward the end of it, during the last two months, I was suffering less than I had been except that once every other day the pain would flare up and become unendurable. Both the doctor and my wife urged me to take some codein before the pain became so terrible, but I hated to take "dope" of any kind, and I'd try to fight it off, in the hope that this time I could go three days. When I would give it up and take some of the codein, I'd have an emotional upset that you'd find it hard to believe. I'd cry as if I'd lost the last friend I had on earth and never expected to have another. These upsets were so terrible -- worse even than the pain -- that I was worried, and wrote to my Portland physician, Dr. Selling, who had been recommended to me as one of the best neurologists in the Northwest, telling him what was happening, and asking him what it meant, and what I ought to do about it. He came right back with the assurance that these emotional upsets were due simply to the fact that my nerves were worn out by the long-continued pain which I had suffered, and that when the pain subsided, as it was already beginning to do, I'd be completely free of my emotional upsets. It was better than that. The emotional upsets disappeared while I still had considerable pain, and I've not had a symptom of anything of the sort since.

I certainly did not start this letter with the expectation that I'd run on clear over to Page 4, but here I am. I promise you that I'll not run on to Page 5.

I've not wet a line in any kind of fishing since last fall, and I did very little of it then. I'd like to try for salmon some day, and there is a bare possibility that Emmett Gulley and I may get in a few hours Saturday morning, though there is no certainty of it. I might try it tomorrow if I could get somebody to go with me if it were not for the fact that I have a Heifers-for-Relief committee in Portland that I ought to attend, and a meeting for the promotion of the campaign of Douglas McKay for the nomination for governor that I'd like to be in on and hear what there is to hear.

Here's hoping that you continue to gain without any interruptions. But if there are days that are not so good as the days that have immediately preceded, you'll soon be gaining again and go still farther than ever along the road to complete and permanent recovery. May that happy time come soon.

With kindest regards and best wishes from both of us,

Sincerely your friend,