

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Edward Sisson, August 2, 1948

Levi T. Pennington

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August 2, 1948.

Dr. Edward C. Sisson,
Box 1774,
Carmel, California.

DEAR FRIEND:--

Let me thank you for your letter of July 30, which has just arrived. Your opening remark reminds me of the saying so common when I was much younger, "It's no disgrace to be poor, but it is very inconvenient", only, as near as I can recall, the word "very" was replaced by a word suggestive of mending socks.

As far as poverty is concerned, I've had a taste of it myself. I was one of ten children, and I can prove by mathematics that we all starved to death, for Father never made enough in the way of income to keep us all fed. Of course the proof breaks down a bit when anybody looks at my 225 pounds, and I am not the heaviest of the five sons, though I am the tallest.

There was no thought of putting you on the spot in my letter telling you of All Kinds of Weather. And I know you are not boasting when you say you are not poetry-minded -- a man does not boast of being color-blind or tone-deaf. And maybe if you read the book, which I am sure you will never do, you'd decide that does not have enough poetry in it to hurt. For the most part it is pretty sober stuff, some of it, I suppose, positively grim. And not being poetry-minded you may not want to read the rest of this letter. If you don't, that's all right. I know of no law, sacred or secular, moral or social, natural or artificial, that requires you to read it. But just to show you why I called the book All Kinds of Weather, I'm going to write a few samples indicating that the various numbers in it were written in various moods -- and tenses.

Here's one, sober to the point of grimness:

THE LAST HOUR.

When the last hour has come, and I lie waiting
For that grim summons to the other world;
When all earth's grieving, longing, loving, hating
Into the past's abysses have been hurled;
When all that I have known is fast receding,
And all I have believed is fading, too;
When the last hope for life has ceased its pleading
And everything is done, and nought's to do;
When the last moment comes and I am sinking ~~out of~~
Out of all life as I have known it here,
May I have power to meet my end unshrinking;
Let me go out of life without a fear.
What scenes I next shall see I do not know,
But may I have a brave heart as I go.

Well, it's a far cry from that to this one:

MODERN FABLES. II. THE HOOP SNAKE.

(Ouch! I did not know I was so near the bottom of the page. Let's start again.)

MODERN FABLES. II. THE HOOP SNAKE.

 This creature is the hoop snake. He lives among the gravel,
 But when he would go places, my how that boy can travel.
 He takes his long tail in his mouth and he begins to roil,
 And travels like the wind but rather faster, on my soul.
 While other snakes go squirming and wriggling on the ground,
 This enterprising serpent a better way has found.
 He's overcome his handicaps and made himself so fleet
 That he can outstrip anything that travels on four feet.

MORAL.

The moral of this fable is very short and sweet.
 Even when times are hardest, you can make both ends meet.

Love's Pantheism is too long, four stanzas, the first declaring that the wife was a part of the dawn and the dawn a part of her, the second saying the same of the sunshine of noon, the third saying in eight lines the same about the sunset, and I'll quote the last stanza:

I sit alone in the moonlight now
 As the midnight breezes blow,
 And you come to me and you touch my brow
 As you did in the long ago.
 And my heart is stirred by a magic word
 Of hope till the night wears through,
 For you are a part of the moonlight, dear,
 And the moonlight a part of you.

And if Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star does not differ in spirit from this, then I've not succeeded. It goes like this:

TWINKLE, TWINKLE, LITTLE STAR.
 (To a well-known movie performer.)

 twinkle, twinkle, little star,
 How I wonder who you are.
 You were married yesterday,
 Now you are divorced, they say.

When the blazing sun is set,
 You say, "This match is all wet."
 Then you get a new divorce
 Quick as man could swap a horse.

Thus you flit from mate to mate
 Giving one by one the gate.
 Though I know not who you are,
 Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

Two more, and then I'll quit. One is the sonnet which opens one section of the book, dealing with love, passion and such things.

LOVE.

 Love is a jailer, puts the heart in prison.
 Love is the great emancipator, too.

Love casts to hell him that to heaven has risen.
 Love lifts the soul from night to heaven's blue.
 Love fills the mind with every form of terror.
 Love that is perfect casts out every fear.
 Love blinds the eyes with myriad forms of error.
 Love shows the truth than all things else more clear.
 Love is a thief that steals away your treasures.
 Love is the bounteous giver of all good.
 Love sweetens living with unmeasured pleasures.
 Love nails the heart upon the bleeding rood.

If you would sink below or soar above,
 For heaven or hell, open your heart to love.

The last one I'm quoting is the first one written, the first one that got into this book, that is. It was written shortly after the death of my first wife now more than 45 years ago. Her maiden name was Bertha May Waters, hence the somewhat disguised alphabetical title.

To B.M.W.

When in the dusk of evening o'er my soul,
 Like the dull glow that lights the dimming west,
 Comes the remembrance of that hour most blest
 When my lone wandering spirit found its goal
 In thy dear heart, and of its love the whole
 Rich treasure offered, finding perfect rest
 In sweet fulfilment of thy love confessed,
 My heart rejoices -- then the church bells toll.

The light dies in my spirit as the glow
 Fades from the evening sky, for thou art gone.
 A little taste of heaven here below,
 Then night that ever since has darker grown.
 God called thee home, although I loved thee so;
 God called thee home, and I am left alone.

Now why should a man inflict all those verses on a friend who is not poetry-minded? I don't know myself. But I'll tell you what to do. Don't read 'em.

My wife, the inspirer of many of these verses directly and indirectly the inspirer of many more, had a severe illness early in May which gave me the scare of my life. She is better now, doing most of the work she has usually done about the house, though with more than the usual help from her husband. But she has not been in any kind of meeting since May 5, and is not to accompany me on a trip that I must take, if she keeps as well as she is now, which will keep me away all of the month of September -- the wedding of our granddaughter, who recently graduated from Earlham college, my alma mater, with high honors, and the annual session of Indiana Yearly Meeting of Friends, where I am to give a daily sermon and deliver the annual lecture on Quakerism.

With kindest regards and best wishes, I am

Sincerely your friend,