

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Frederick Libby, June 4, 1965

Levi T. Pennington

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June 4, 1965.

Dear Friend:--

Your letter of May 31 suggesting that on what I am expecting that I shall be doing in the year 2039 has a tendency toward starting a man to dream -- or would it be a nightmare? -- about the future. (I have a novel outlined and started but it will never be finished, about a visit to Venus fifty years ago by a man who anticipated atomic power and a number of other marvels, who lived and loved there on a planet where there was no evil, who came back to earth, leaving with his friend a record of his experience, a record to be kept secret for fifty years -- just now given to the public -- and then blew into atoms with a gigantic atomic explosion his laboratories, all his records, etc. You'd be surprised at some of the things he had to tell about the life on Venus.

Well, some of the things he found there are already realities in the earth now, though they were not when I outlined this story away back when. But there were things there that would astonish the best pseudo-scientific comic strip artist.

What'll I be doing in 2039 A.D.? Well, certainly nothing whatever in "little earth so lone", unless through some one whom I have influenced, for good or evil.

But I am sure you had in mind something more than a personal question. You were thinking of what the world will be like three quarters of a century from now.

It was Patrick Henry, I believe, who said "I know of no way to judge the future but by the past." (I know a funny story in which Patrick Henry plays a part.) The present will soon be the past, and a man has to be blind in one eye and unable to see with the other to feel very happy about the present, and it's not Viet Nam nor Haiti, nor even what the trouble in either place can lead to that makes a man feel far from hilarious as he thinks ...

I wrote an article some weeks ago which I entitled "How Can I Be Happy?" I thought I could lay my hands on it and I was going to send you a copy of it but you escaped. But it referred to the fact that half the world goes to bed undernourished every night, it mentioned the millions of homeless refugees, it emphasized the fact that "Christian" America and "godless" Russia each has atomic power enough to wipe the whole human race off the earth, it referred to the recent murder, by the nation that was once the center of Christendom, of millions of men, women and children whose only offence was the fact that they belonged to the race of which Jesus Christ was a member -- not in that order and in better form than this -- you can see what a terrible thing it was. Aren't you glad you do not have to read it?

On the basis of the definitely possible disasters that may lie ahead, and of the madness that war and hate sometimes bring to the human race, one could imagine an earth depopulated long before 2039 A.D., possibly with the only inhabitants left on the globe

a race of savages so far up the Amazon that the blessings of civilization had not reached them and they now escaped the final curse of all-out atomic warfare that had left only a few hundreds of low order pagans, instead of billions of different races, some of whom were among the most highly developed human beings that had ever lived.

Well, that is not a pretty picture to look at, but it is not out of the range of possibilities.

Imagination can paint a much prettier picture; a world in which war has actually been abandoned quite as definitely as chattel slavery has been abandoned by all civilized nations; in which the kind of poverty under which so large a portion of the earth's people groan has been abolished; a world in which the forces and resources of the earth are used so effectively that it is possible for all mankind to have suitable food, clothing and shelter; a world in which ignorance has ceased to be; a world that has so far accepted the principles of real Christianity that crime has ceased to be, along with juvenile delinquency, connubial unfaithfulness, vice of all sorts -- wake up, Levi; you are dreaming.

Not all of this will happen by 2039; but if the vast resources that are wasted in war could only be turned into the enterprises of peace, that alone would work a most wonderful transportation, long before 2039 -- or any other year that begins with a 2.

We can hope and work and pray for better things. But I can't help thinking of what Burns wrote in his poem "To a Field Mouse", (spelling not guaranteed):

Still thou art blest compared wi' me;
The present only touches thee,
But ah, I backward cast my ee
On prospect drear,
And for'ard though I canna see
I guess, and fear.

With best wishes always, and the hope that better and safer and happier days are ahead for the world,

Sincerely your friend,

Frederick J. Libby,
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Washington 9, D. C.