

Levi Pennington

People

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Levi Pennington To Edward Kemp, December 16, 1965

Levi T. Pennington
George Fox University

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December 16, 1965.

Edward Kemp,
Acquisition Librarian,
University of Oregon,
Eugene, Oregon. 97403.

Dear Mr. Kemp:--

Your interest in my correspondence as a possible acquisition for the University Library prompts me to write a sort of "report of progress", if progress is what I have been doing.

First of all, about the correspondence itself. I keep working on that from time to time, off and on, as one might say, but very much more off than on. I've just finished 1941, burning probably ^{more} more than one letter out of ten. The ones that became smoke and ashes were those that were strictly personal-it seems to me that it could have very little value to posterity to know that on some date or other I wrote to John Doe in Florida, in answer to a letter from him asking for the address of a man who used to live in Westland who died in 1914, so that I could not possibly give his present address, or the fact that I wrote to my daughter in New York and told her that we had made some jelly from the grapes that had just ripened (if it will comfort you any, I am putting all my correspondence with this daughter into a big envelope each year, and they will pass into her hands, probably with the rest of the correspondence, and anybody who wants that correspondence will have to deal with her); the vast amount of literature put out by the American Friends Service Committee (anyone wanting historical material from that source could get tons of it without going to private correspondence); and similar, though not so voluminous, material from other sources, such as the University of Oregon, Earlham College, Friends Committee on National Legislation, National Council for Prevention of War; etc. That murderous work of destruction will proceed, I suppose, as I am able to command the courage and energy. I hope I am not doing what might cause real loss to posterity.

Now I have gone far enough with "Rambling Recollections of Ninety Happy Years", which I am sure I have mentioned to you, so that it is in the hands of a typist who will get it into readable form as she has time from her regular duties. Much of it has been written by hand, at odd times and certainly in many odd places and under odd circumstances. There were duplications, repetitions and other things that should have been eliminated, as many of them have been, but it is not thinkable that all of them have been. I have completed this work except for two chapters, "Miscellany", in which I have related things that might be of interest to my immediate descendants and perhaps to others but usually have no direct historical bearing; and "Friends I have Known", which deals with such characters as Rufus M. Jones, Herbert Hoover, Emmett W. Gulley and others of more or less note among Friends -- and I may include some friends as well as Friends.

I may have this material printed in book form. If I

do, it will naturally have to be at my own expense, and I do not know yet what I shall use for money. And if it is ever put into book form, I think I shall have to ask those who want a copy, and it will not be many, to pay a price for it which will help me in some small part at least to meet the expense of publication.

It will be a strange volume if it ever is published. Started with the idea of writing something just for the gratification of my children and grandchildres, my brothers and sisters and some of their children and a few of my friends and associates in the various enterprises with which I have been connected, it is partly frivolous, or at least lacking in seriousness. The first five chapter headings will suggest the rather jocular mood with which the writing was started more than 20 years ago. And even when it deals with my own personal history it is not a chronological account, dealing with everything as it came along; but in dealing with special matters like Pacific College and Oregon Yearly Meeting the same years are dealt with as have been treated before under other themes. As the title suggests, it is "Rambling Recollections" rather than logical and chronological history.

Maybe you will be interested in the chapter headings, with perhaps an occasional comment or explanation as to the matter included. Here are the titles of the various chapters.

1. Foreword.
2. Preface.
3. Prologue.
4. Prelude.
5. Introduction. This last gives a brief account of my life up to the time of my arrival in Oregon to be president of Pacific College, in 1911.
6. Great Decisions. This chapter deals with such matters as my religious conversion, my decision to leave the field of journalism for the ministry, my decision to leave the work of pastor and go into the field of education as head of a struggling little Quaker college more than 2000 miles away, in a part of the country that I had never visited.
7. Pacific College. This goes into some detail in the life of the college, dealing briefly with the history before I came as the fourth president and with the history since my retirement, but mostly with the years during which I was president.
8. Oregon Yearly Meeting. This chapter deals with the history of the meeting that contains the Friends of the so-called "orthodox" branch of the Friends Church in Oregon, Idaho and Washington.
9. A Peculiar People. Dealing with the Society of Friends, called and sometimes officially the Friends Church, and ordinarily spoken of as The Quakers, dealing with some of the outstanding "peculiarities", characteristics and activities of this denomination.
10. The Forward Movement. The advance movement of the Five Years Meeting, of which I was Executive Director during the two years of its existence, at the close of which, as planned, the various works that it had inaugurated were turned back

- to the regular boards of the Five Years Meeting.
11. My Love Affairs. This is not a story of a modern Lothario or other "lady killer", but deals with the many Friends and friends whose kindness and love won my own, mostly men and women old enough to be my parents, and with my brief life with my first love, my first wife and the mother of my children, and then with the life with Rebecca, my joy, my inspiration, my comfort and my inspiration for more than fifty-years of our life together.
 12. My Literary "Career." Dealing with my work as a newspaper man, my writings for religious journals, my short stories and other productions, most of which have never seen an editor and never will. There are four book-length productions in this list, one a work on evangelism that has had a bit of circulation among Friends ministers; one a story of a marriage that should have been a very happy one but wasn't; one an "autobiography" of the Apostle Peter; and one a "whodunnit" that would never sell even if I tried hard to sell it, because it violates editorial traditions that are like the laws of the Medes and Persians.
 13. Burning Fifty Thousand Letters. You know about that already.
 14. Songs of Long Ago. Just a little insight into the kind of songs that were sung in the little country community where I lived when a boy, and on up to the time of the Spanish-American War. Some real atrocities.
 15. Friends I Have Known. I've mentioned this chapter before.
 16. Miscellany. I've mentioned this before; stories of individuals, of largely unrelated incidents, etc.
 17. How it Feels to be Ninety Years Old.

Hope this hasn't bored you to tears. This is the story of how the manuscript will look when it comes back from the typist. (I don't mean that it will be as bad a piece of typing as this is, but it gives you an idea of the contents.) What changes I shall make in the material before I turn it over to the printer, if it is ever to assume book form, I do not know. If it ever becomes a book it will certainly not be in 1965.

Sincerely yours,

Levi T. Pennington.

I intended to tell you of one of my chief difficulties. Some of the things that were done, especially in connection with Pacific College, Oregon Yearly Meeting, the American Friends Service Committee and in action concerning some individuals, have not been to the credit of the college management and faculty (not in my day, for no man ever had a more loyal faculty behind him than I had for thirty years), nor of the yearly meeting leadership, and definitely to the discredit of some persons aside from official action. The story that it seems to me needs to be

told, aside from the official, recorded actions, cannot well be put into words without mention of certain leaders, the presiding officer of the yearly meeting at the time of Oregon Yearly Meeting's secession from the Five Years Meeting, the presiding officer (not the same man) when Emmett Gulley was driven out of the presidency of the college (at a financial loss to the college of half a million dollars), the superintendent of the yearly meeting, certain ministers of the yearly meeting, etc. The actions of some of these that I have mentioned are much to their credit, as I have always believed; the actions of some others would not have done credit to a political "smear" campaign unless it be that they "out-Heroded Herod". Well, most of the folks involved in these actions have gone to their reward, and surely it cannot hurt them to have their names connected with this story of mine, for there is nothing that was not well known at the time it occurred; nothing that is not backed up by public records or things that were well understood.

It is not nice to say of some folks that unfortunately they have not died yet, so I'll not say it. But I can say that some of those who figured prominently in the forcing of Emmett Gulley out of the presidency of the college, in the separation of the yearly meeting from the work of the American Friends Service Committee, in the secession of the yearly meeting from the Five Years Meeting, in the "unfrocking" of Robert H. Dann, and other things that I could name -- some of the folks who figured largely in these things are still alive and hereabouts. Two of them are on the George Fox College force, one of them back on the force after withdrawing years ago without any objection to his withdrawal; one of them is on the faculty of another college in Oregon; one of them is pastor of one of the meetings in the yearly meeting and has an official position in that body; and it certainly would not be a happy thing for these Friends to face in print the story of what they did, just as it was done, sometimes in the open and sometimes behind the scenes.

Well, what I have done is to tell the actions that were taken without going into personalities in the manuscript that is now being typed and may be published. But to make the story complete, I plan to go into details to a considerable extent, and to tell "names and stories both", this more detailed account to go to certain colleges and universities in which I have confidence, to be sealed for a considerable time, perhaps for 25 years or more, perhaps till the last death of those in a certain list -- at any rate to be sealed till there is little or no danger of the account doing any living person harm.

L. T. P.