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Levi Pennington To Ellis F Lawrence, December 11, 1941

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Recommended Citation

Pennington, Levi T., "Levi Pennington To Ellis F Lawrence, December 11, 1941" (1941). *Levi Pennington*. 316.

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Mr. Ellis F. Lawrence, R.L.E., 918 Failing Building, Portland, Oregon.

Dear Friend: --

Isn't it hard to hear even the fortissimo passages from the symphony orchestra? The roar of the guns and the boom of the bombs and the cries of the dying and the fighting drewn out the music. It is going to be hard to hear the angels' songs this Christmas eve.

Why is the world in such a terrible state? One can't tell all of it. But there were enough injustices in the Treaty of Versailles to madden the losers in that fight. The victors in the first world war signed the armistice supposedly on the basis of Wilson't fourteen points, then starved Germany into signing the peace treaty on a far different basis, making Germany say things that every signer of the pact knew were not true, and promise to do things that everybody knew she could not do. We did not give the German republic half a chance, and America, England and France shared with others the responsibility for the conditions out of which came Hitler. And years ago, we slapped Japan in the face with the oriental exclusion act. Japan which had held America in higher esteem than any other nation on earth. And we continued to sell to Japan year after year the scrap iron and other war necessities with which she is now destroying our people. No, I'm not pro-Japanese. This attack while going through the motions of seeking a peaceful settlement in the Pacific was one of the most vile and villainous things I know of in history. But our own leaders have not been blameless. One of the most obvious omissions in President Roosevelt's speech was his failure to say such things as these: "I had the authority to stop the sale of war materials to Japan long ago. I was implored to take action, in the name of humanity, and cease to provide the means for Japanese aggression in China and elsewhere. I did not stop this trade. And now Japan is using this material, not only on the Chinese, but on Americans, who provided the material." He did not say that, and I did not expect him to say it. But I was one of the thousands who begged him to stop the flow of war material to Japan, and he did not stop it. And now Japan has attacked us -- it looks like suicide. but they are very able fighters, and they have been, as you suggest, preparing for this for a long time. I wonder how many million innocent Japanese women and children must be starved to death before America wins this war.

Let's turn to something more pleasant, before this room gets so cold that I'll have to go to bed.

Your guess as to the meaning of the degree J.G.F. was right except for three words. The one that follows your name above is no easier to guess, especially by a man with your modesty. And I'm not going to try to guess the meaning of the L.D. degree which you have conferred upon your wife. But I'll guess it is something very nice.

In the language of certain low-brows, the members of the City Club heard a man who "said a forkful" on behalf of the Board of Higher Education. You doubtless saw the article in the Sunday Oregonian. How fine it would be if without wire-pulling or jeal-ousy questions about the two institutions could be settled definitely on the basis of what is best for Higher Education in Oregon. Perhaps that is something beyond the real scope of hope, human nature being what it is. One would hope that there is a "new deal" in the board -- if that expression has not been used so much that one ought to find or coin a new one for use in discussing state higher education. If anybody should try to tell me that the State Board of Higher Education has always acted with the highest wisdom, I'd undertake to prove that they have not been omniscient.

I've not yet got started on "American Faith", but hope to do so soon. But you must be careful in your efforts to make a reader and thinker out of me. Work an engine too hard and it breaks down. Think what you've done already. I've read "Philosophy for Low Brows" (and how I did enjoy it) and I don't know what all else, and I'm not going to try to remember all of it. And I've got this American Faith ahead of me. I've read Henry George's Progress and Poverty, but it was some time ago. (Maybe it was in the 19th century, but I'll not guarantee when it was.)

But it is getting cold, and I must get to bed. Sunday I preach in my own church here. Tuesday I am in Portland for an important meeting of the executive committee of the Northwest Conference on International relations. Wednesday evening I am supposed to broadcast over KOAC, but that may be all off before that time. the following Sunday I speak in Seattle on Food for Europe. And so it goes.

With the earnest hope that the world may reach a just and durable peace long before it now seems possible, I am

Sincerely your friend,

water and work over-