

Levi Pennington

People

1940

Some Contributions of the Liberal Arts Colleges to the Pacific Northwest

Levi T. Pennington
George Fox University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/levi_pennington

Recommended Citation

Pennington, Levi T., "Some Contributions of the Liberal Arts Colleges to the Pacific Northwest" (1940).
Levi Pennington. 389.
https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/levi_pennington/389

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the People at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Levi Pennington by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

SOME CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES
TO THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

By Levi T. Pennington
President of Pacific College
Newberg, Oregon

America's system of higher education is many-sided. But its two main agencies are the great university, usually supported by state taxation, and the independent college of liberal arts, privately supported and often with some sort of church affiliation. The one last named is the older; but in recent decades the great university has had a phenomenal growth.

Thoughtful men and women have no difficulty in seeing the necessity for both these types of higher education. It is with no thought to disparage the state-supported institutions of higher learning that we consider the privately-supported college of liberal arts. I have been asked to present some of the contributions made to the Pacific Northwest by the Liberal Arts Colleges.

In considering this question, it is natural, in these times of depression, to think for a moment in terms of dollars and cents. Mere statistics would be forgotten; but it needs to be remembered that the liberal arts colleges of this region, privately supported, are every year educating thousands of young men and women; and that if they were not supplying this education without public taxation, these young people would be in our state tax-supported colleges and universities, educated at public expense; or they would go entirely outside of the Pacific Northwest, losing to this section great sums in income and sending out of this part of the country vast amounts of money spent elsewhere for education at needlessly high expense; or these young people would have to forego the privilege of higher education altogether, which would be a loss too great to be considered for a moment. The largest part of the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent

every year by these colleges of liberal arts would have to be raised by public taxation if these colleges were not maintained. In financial benefit to the states this section, they are contributing many hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

But a greater contribution than this financial one is being made in what we may call educational technique, in some cases by way of positive advances, in some by way of preventing backward steps.

There are certain tendencies which have worked to the disadvantage of higher education in many of the country's great state institutions which can be and have been more successfully combated in the privately supported colleges of liberal arts. For instance, the tendency to an extreme in the elective system has been successfully opposed by the liberal arts college, which has maintained an integrated course which really gets somewhere; the madness for numbers has been curbed, and emphasis put on quality rather than quantity; the tendency to mass-production and stereotyped product has been overcome, and individual teaching has survived; some of the privately-supported colleges have made a gallant and successful stand against sports madness, and have really maintained educational institutions which have athletics, rather than athletic institutions with some education on the side.

And in positive advance steps in education the liberal arts colleges have done a great service. Moves in the direction of sound honors courses, comprehensive examinations, the fostering of student initiative, the promotion of educative student projects, and that sort of thing, have had exceptional support in the liberal arts colleges, which have often had a larger measure of freedom in this regard than was possible in the tax-supported institutions. The large proportion of the graduates of these colleges going on with years of graduate study attests their recognition of education as a continuing process which does not stop at graduation.

But the greatest contribution made by these independent liberal arts colleges is neither in the realm of the material-financial nor of the intellectual-educational. It is in the world of the spirit that this largest contribution has been made.

It is no unkindly criticism of the state tax-supported institution to say that it does not and in the nature of things cannot be expected to do exactly the same sort of service. Under the necessity of accepting as students thousands who have fitted themselves for higher education through the public high schools, and forced as the great state school is to give them so much that is utilitarian, it is not to be expected that it should to the same degree arouse the hearts of its students to altruistic service as do the colleges which exist by the generous gifts of altruists and for the definite purpose of building character and supporting this same spirit of altruism. As President Hoover has said, "Our universities are getting too large. They are not making character as strongly as it can be made in the smaller and more intimate colleges."

This character development, in which the liberal arts college may be said to specialize, furnishes one of the chief reasons for the outstanding success of so large a proportion of the graduates of these colleges in those occupations not usually regarded as primarily carried on for altruistic purposes. Sound character developed in undergraduate days, and sound fundamental scholarship preceding specialization have sent a surprisingly large share of the graduates of the liberal arts colleges of the Pacific Northwest to places of eminence, in legislative halls, government positions, at the bar and on the bench, in district and supreme courts of the states and in the federal courts, in medicine and surgery, in engineering and banking, in art and in business. These liberal arts colleges have put their stamp on the Pacific Northwest, exerting an influence out of all proportion to the number of their graduates. If one were to attempt

to name the leaders of the Northwest and of America who have come out of these liberal arts colleges, hours rather than minutes would have to be devoted to this talk. Here is a graduate of one of these colleges who decade after decade moulded public sentiment as editor of the most influential daily of his day in the whole Pacific Northwest; when death stopped his service, the graduate of a sister college took his place and ably carried on this great work; and side by side with him, editor of his greatest rival journal, worked a fellow alumnus of his; leaders in every line of worthwhile activity have gone out from these colleges -- one of them now occupying the White House, after conducting for years the greatest life-saving enterprise the world has ever known. One of the colleges of Oregon has more names of its graduates in "Who's Who in America" than its three nearest denominational neighbors, though each one of the three is larger than this Oregon College.

But it is in the realm of the so-called "sacrificial callings" that the contribution of these liberal arts colleges is most clearly marked. One of these colleges has sent two-thirds of its graduates for the last twenty years into the teaching profession; another one more than half. And in this relatively poorly paid profession the graduates of the liberal arts college are making a great contribution, in high positions and in humble places too. It has always been true that most of the ministers and missionaries of the Christian faith come from the denominational colleges, and in these lines of service these institutions of the Pacific Northwest have made a great contribution, not only in leadership here but in national and international leadership. The head of the Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada is a graduate of one of our liberal arts colleges; the highest national officer in one of our denominations is from another; the head of the world-wide Christian Endeavor movement from another; and in those callings which demand the greatest sacrifices, the

carrying of physical and mental and spiritual relief to those parts of the world that still "sit in darkness and under the shadow of death", these colleges have made a contribution out of all proportion to their wealth, their size, and their apparent power.

The tax-supported institutions of higher education have a great and an indispensable share in our educational system. They should, they must be maintained, as on high a plane of efficiency and usefulness as possible. But when they have done all they can do, there is a large sphere of usefulness still left for the privately supported liberal arts colleges. They can give help to many to whom the great university cannot minister; they can give to many some forms of help which the great university, because of its very greatness among other things, cannot give. If these liberal arts colleges are not maintained and advanced in their effectiveness, it will be to the inevitable and irreparable loss of the people of the Pacific Northwest.