

## Parable Of The Cherry Tree

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In March of 1967, at a seminar of the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, this paper was presented by Robert A. Hockstad, then Grand Master of Masons in Michigan. M.W. Bro Hockstad now serves as Chairman of the Execulive Commission of the Masonic Service Association. The original title of this paper was:

### **BUILDING RELATIONS WITH THE BLUE LODGE.**

At first thought this topic might seem rather meaningless, for Building Relations between the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine and the Masonic Lodge is, in effect, building a relationship between a man and himself, since we are all members of the same body .

Yet, and all too often, the right hand knoweth not what the left hand is doing, and, even though we be members of the same parent body, misunderstandings and lack of communication do exist. It is in the hope that a closer rapport may exist, and in the firm conviction that it should exist, that Seminars such as this are called, and it is my pleasure, as a Grand Master of Masons, to participate therein.

In the spare time left over after serving the Grand Lodge, I am engaged in fruit processing in Northern Michigan, and it is from this experience that I would draw the symbolic picture of our Fraternity, and the specific application to the subject under discussion.

We in Michigan grow the finest sweet cherries in the world, largely because of the manner in which we prepare the tree. The nursery stock, carefully chosen, is nurtured and tended with constant attention until the main trunk has attained growth and vigor. It is then pruned and directed into two or more principal branches – growing outward – to provide the greatest exposure to the elements, and the largest area on the outer, or bearing, surface. Consider, if you will, how closely this parallels our Masonic Fraternity. We institute a new Lodge, or bend our attentions to one already existent. In the beginning, we give it our full attention, and nurture it through the work of the Brothers in securing petitions for membership. Through this devotion the Lodge flourishes and attains growth and vigor. It is at this stage – if not before – that the 'pruning' starts, and dedicated and zealous men direct the Brethren into the divergent paths of the Scottish Rite, the York Rite, and the myriad other offshoots of Freemasonry. With this, per

se, I have no quarrel, since there should be enough workers in the quarries of our Craft to necessitate additional outlets for their talents.

But let us get back to our tree, which is now in the full flower of its maturity. And let us consider, particularly, the most spectacular of the divergent branches. It is on this branch that the blossoms are thickest in the Spring, as it displays its beauties for all the world to see, and provides nectar in bounteous supply for the bees which here assemble. Here, too, will hang, in greatest profusion, the fruits of the labor of the tree. Fruit which will furnish food for the birds of the air, and will, in harvest, be plucked and utilized by man for his sustenance and pleasure.

It is to this branch that I would compare the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. For, of all segments of our Fraternity, certainly the Shrine is the most colorful, and in its pageantry it displays its beauties before the world, as it furnishes the nectar of fellowship and pleasure to the workers in Shrinedom. It is in the labor of this Mystic Circle that we find, too, the finest fruits of human endeavor, as to its outstretched arms are drawn the halt, the lame, and the burned, to be restored to health and to take flight, like the birds, from pain and the shackles of the crippled, to the heights of joy and the potential of a full and rich life.

Again, consider our literal tree, now in the fullness of its harvest. Observe how the several branches, deliberately separated, are bending away from each other with their load of fruit. It is now that a strong wind, a chance blow, a lightning stroke, or even the preoccupation of the tree itself in increasing its fruit, may be the cause of stretching the fabric of the tree past its breaking point, and the branch may tear away and crash to the ground, there to die.

Similarly, in our symbolic tree, again deliberately separated as to its branches, the strong wind of unfavorable publicity, the chance blow of a thoughtless remark, the lightning stroke of an ill-considered deed or proposal, or the preoccupation with the increasing of membership and activities in any one branch without a corresponding increase in the parent Lodge, may so imbalance the fabric of our Craft that one or all of its branches may fall away, or even the Lodge itself wither from the drain on its resources.

In our trees, we could probably avoid this danger by training the tree into one main stem, with smaller branches emanating from it. Thus, too with our Fraternity. There are those who say that any of the appendant bodies must be so closely entwined with the Lodge that, to all intents and purposes, they might as well be one. To this I do not subscribe. It is my firm conviction that the several parts of our Order should be separated, and that, while all, of course, must stem from and owe allegiance to the Lodge, it is of equal importance that they be allowed to independently flourish and to bring forth their own individual harvest of charity and good works.

In actuality, the good orchardist preserves his trees by propping up the heavy-laden branches, and by tying the several branches together for mutual support. This I propose for our symbolic tree, and, while the things of which I shall speak are directed primarily to you as fellow Nobles, they may be equally applied to any of the other principal branches of our Craft.

I shall dwell but briefly on the 'props', as they are, at best, only a temporary and sometimes insecure help, and it is in the ties that we must place our trust.

In general, the props which we employ might be considered to be those things which are promulgated by the Grand Bodies or by the Temples as a unit. In this category would be the formation of Shrine Degree Teams who are available to the Lodges. This is of tremendous value in cementing relations with the Lodge affected, and I most heartily endorse this program. I class it as a 'prop' only because with changing personnel it may well be abandoned by a Temple.

Similarly, in the respect that it is temporary in effect, would be the Shrine Ceremonials and the publicity attendant thereon. Certainly there cannot help but be an awareness of the occasion among the members of the Lodges in the area, and, if done in good taste, it cannot help but reflect with credit on the Fraternity and may well induce Master Masons to wish to belong to such an obviously fine organization.

On the Imperial Council level, there can be no greater service to humanity than the programs to care for the children in the several hospitals maintained by the Shrine. I am sure that every Master Mason joins with me in his pride at being a member of the great Fraternity which is the father to the child which has provided this most magnificent of humanitarian charities, and, on every occasion at which the Hospitals are publicized, I am sure that each of us basks in the reflected credit which our relationship to the Shrine makes possible.

Just as the ties which bind together our literal tree are the permanent and most effective means of preserving the tree, so are the figurative ties which bind our Fraternity into one whole, the permanent and most effective means of promoting and preserving the fabric of our Craft, and of illuminating the warp and woof of that tapestry which is our Fraternal life.

Some of these ties are traditional, and form the foundation for the bonds which join us together in unity and brotherhood. Of such is the relationship between the Shrine and the Rites in Masonry which require membership in the Knights Templar, or that the petitioner be a 32<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Rite Mason.

In the final analysis, however, each and every tie is composed of a weaving together of many individual fibers, and may be best represented in our case as being constituted by the combined efforts and effects of the countless numbers of individual Masons who collectively form the institution we know as the Shrine.

It is, then, through individuals that we must look to the Building of Relations, even though the direction may well come from the echelon of officers within the respective bodies.

By the same token, it is the individual Noble who is responsible for some unfortunate incidents which have occurred within the scope of my knowledge, and which give ammunition to the Brother who claims allegiance only to the Lodge. As Nobles, let us be always circumspect in our conduct.

On the positive side, we ought to attend our Lodges, and evince an active interest in its affairs. Develop a genuine interest in the welfare of the Lodge, in the education of its members, and in the promotion of petitions for membership in the Lodge, remembering always that it is from the Lodge originally that Shrine members must come.

Finally, my Brethren, let us recognize that all our relations must be on a personal, one-to-one basis, and that each of us has a responsibility to strive for not only a fraternal relationship within the framework of our several Masonic Bodies, but also that, as Masons, we must have a one-to-one relationship with our Creator such that, by Faith, we may forge an instrument of Peace, of Hope, and, above all, of Charity, to the end that this Fraternity, with all its parts, may justify its existence and be a force for the right in this troubled world.

By so doing, you will have built the best possible relationship with your Blue Lodge.

SO MOTE IT BE

*STB - August 1980*