

## THE MYSTIC TIE

-by- Allen E. Roberts

## PREAMBLE

I have been led to believe that this part of the program is not supposed to be intellectual, so your program chairman certainly made an excellent choice.

Sometimes we get overly impressed with ourselves, especially when we get a title of some description. And, by golly, we've got plenty of titles in Freemasonry. In fact, we've got so many none of us know what all of them mean. In the business world it has become almost as bad. When a fellow, or lady, reaches his level of incompetence, he usually becomes a vice president.

A couple of fellows got to talking the other day about how important they were. One of them, a vice president, got downright obnoxious, so his friend decided to put him in his place. "Joe," says he, "vice presidents are a dime a dozen."

"That's not so," said Joe indignantly. "You've got to have something on the ball to reach that high level in any business."

"I'll prove you're wrong," said his friend. He picked up the phone and called a local supermarket. "Let me talk to the vice president in charge of prunes." The voice on the other end asked: "Package or bulk?"

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Two fellows were sharing a room in an old Baptist hospital. With nothing to do they became bored and decided to play poker. When they asked the nurse for playing cards, her frown could have frozen the Hades. She relented, however, and brought them a flock of cards containing case histories. The fellows agreed these were better than nothing, so they shuffled and dealt them.

One said: "I've got two appendectomies and two tonsillectomies." The other said: "I've got four enemas." "Then," said the first fellow, "you take the pot. You need it more than I do."

A right good minister always used a manuscript when he preached his sermons. One of his flock decided one Sunday morning to have a little fun with him, so he took the last two pages of his manuscript out of his notebook. The preacher got along fine. He was really preaching up a storm. Everyone could tell he was reaching the climax when he shouted: "And Adam said to Eve; and Adam said to Eve; and Adam said to Eve," and almost in a whisper: "There seems to be a leaf missing."

## THE MYSTIC TIE

What is this tie that binds most Freemasons together? What is it that makes the heart beat a little faster when a Brother receives an honor or achieves a great victory? What is it that makes a Brother weep with another in his sorrow, and makes one go out his way to assist the distressed?

What tie is it that unites the families of Brothers, and makes the happiness and problems of each their own?

Think along with me for a few moments and let us try to find the answer. Let's look at some who may have found the answer.

One of these Freemasons was Joseph Fort Newton. In his autobiography, River of Years, Brother Newton tells us his father was made a Mason in a Military Lodge. During the course of a battle his dad, a Confederate, was captured by Union troops. He was subsequently taken to a prison camp at Rock Island, Illinois. While there he became deathly ill, but he managed to make himself known as a Mason.

A Federal officer, a Freemason, took him to his home, nursed him back to health and when the war was over, gave him money and a gun so he could return home to Texas.

Joseph Newton, the son, was so impressed by this act, which he said made the hells of war more endurable and the Fraternity that could remember a Brother's welfare in times like those, that he petitioned a Lodge as soon as he was old enough to do so. That eminent Mason and minister enriched the literature of Freemasonry with several books and hundreds of talks, articles and sermons.

During a particularly stormy session of a meeting of The Masonic Service Association, when Brothers were fighting Brothers and Grand Lodges quitting the Association, Newton told those present:

Freemasonry's simplicity, its dignity, and its spirituality sustain me in all that I try to do, and permit me to forget the incredible pettiness of mind that we sometimes encounter, sustaining and enabling me to join hands with my Brethren everywhere, to do something, if it be only a little, before the end of the day, to make a gentler, kinder, and wiser world in which to live."

I have never found another writer who could turn prose into beautiful poetry. Newton was convinced, and so am I, that Freemasonry is that answer to most of the problems found in the world today. I should qualify this statement -- the principles of Freemasonry are the answer.

This was another of those cases that proves Brotherly Love has no stopping point. Just a little goes far and endures from age to age.

Among the many others who found this tie was Henry Price of Massachusetts, who almost single-handed kept Freemasonry alive in the

formative years beginning in 1733. Then there was another Massachusetts Mason, Melvin Maynard Johnson, who early in the Twentieth Century worked for all branches of Masonry. His writings were monumental; his research extra-ordinary (even though he attempted to make Massachusetts Masonry first in everything); his speeches and articles on Masonic law and the rights of Grand Lodges over all other bodies kept the Masonic hierarchy on a straight path.

George Washington definitely found this tie. He spent his lifetime working for his colony of Virginia, then State of Virginia, the people of the new United States of America in war and in peace. These activities kept him from being an active participant in Masonic Lodges, but didn't diminish his love for the Craft.

Benjamin Franklin was one of the few businessmen who worked for the freedom of America without seeking a profit. No job was too small or unimportant for him to tackle on behalf of his country. He was one of the first men to recognize the importance of Freemasonry in the colonies of the New World. He was active in Masonic affairs here and in France throughout his life. He was another who found this tie we're trying to define.

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Newton's was one example of this peculiar tie at work during the War of Northern Aggression. Another example occurred in the village of Hampton, Virginia. It was about to be burned by Union Forces. When the commanding officer learned there was a Masonic Lodge in the town, he sent some of his men into the temple to remove the jewels, charter and records. Then he ordered every building in the town burned to the ground, including the Lodge.

The objects removed from the Lodge were sent to the Grand Lodge of Maryland with the request that they be turned over to the Grand Lodge of Virginia as soon as possible. This was done before the war had ended.

Early in 1864 Federal troops took over Winchester and held it until well after hostilities had ceased. Earlier, when the Federals had occupied Winchester they had permitted Winchester-Hiram Lodge No. 21 to operate, and several Union officers and men had received their degrees there. Because of that a committee from the Lodge attempted to see General Sheridan, the Commanding Officer, but he refused to interview them, until one of the officers of the Lodge contacted a friend in the cabinet in Washington. The resulting note speedily gave them an audience with Sheridan.

Sheridan refused to let the Lodge reopen, as had been expected, because of his religious and political views, but one of his staff officers, a Mason, argued in favor of the Lodge. He promised to be in attendance at all of its meetings and report to the commander anything detrimental to the Union cause. Sheridan finally reluctantly agreed.

As a result of the resumption of labor, 207 members of the Federal troops were made Master Masons in that Lodge. Among them was a Captain from Ohio, William McKinley, who was later to become President of the United States and fall from an assassin's bullet. And several men later

awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor were also among them.

Picture, if you will, those Confederate Masons making Masons of those who captured their town a short time earlier. Where can we find a more graphic picture of the Universality of Masonry? When political enemies can lay aside their differences to meet on the level and part upon the square, Freemasonry has something the whole world needs.

I want to add this footnote: during this "brothers' war," with the exception of those from one Grand Master, not a single word was uttered that could be termed unMasonic. Nor as far as I can determine, was a Freemason, even though on the opposite side, refused assistance from another Mason. When you think of the period, that was remarkable!

The year was 1863. New Orleans had fallen before Farragut's fleet and Butler's army. Up and down the Mississippi river ranged Union gunboats. Among them was the United States steamer Albatross, with Lieutenant-Commander John E. Hart, United States Navy, of Schenectady, New York, and a member of St. George's Lodge No. 5, Free and Accepted Masons, as her commander. Captain Hart was stricken with a fever contracted on duty that held him, delirious, in his bunk in his tiny stateroom.

In the log of the Albatross, the following official entry yet survives in the navy department archives at Washington: "June 11, 1863: 4:15 p.m. The report of a pistol was heard in the captain's stateroom. The steward at once ran in and found the captain lying on the floor with blood oozing from his head and a pistol near him, one barrel of which was discharged. The surgeon was at once called but life was extinct."

On Captain Hart's personal official record in the navy department archives is the charitable notation, "Died of wounds," although there is no doubt that, in his delirium, he shot himself.

There was no Confederate force at St. Francisville that day to defend the town. The lovely old place lay passive and took 100 shells, which riddled the old courthouse, ruined Grace church, and shattered the beautiful stained-glass window above the altar. The few Confederate soldiers there on leave could only grind their teeth in impotent rage.

Suddenly, the firing ceased. Those who watched from the bluff saw a white boat put out from the Albatross, an officer in the stern, Union sailors rowing, and in the bow a white flag.

Two brothers dwelt at the foot of the bluff, Samuel and Benjamin White, both of them Masons. They met the Union naval officer as the boat docked. The officer asked: "Is there a Mason in this town?"

They told him there was. The officer told them to inform the Master they had the body of a Mason who had requested a Masonic funeral ashore before he had died. The Master of the Lodge was with the Confederate forces in another State, but W. W. Leake, the Senior Warden was in town on furlough. When informed of the situation, he said: "It is my duty as a Mason to set aside politics and do what I can for a Brother Mason." He agreed to conduct the funeral.

The flag of truce yet flying, the men from the Albatross carried Captain Hart's body ashore, clad in the uniform of a United States naval officer. At the foot of the bluff to meet it, their Masonic regalia worn above their uniforms of Confederate gray, stood four members of Feliciana Lodge No. 31 of St. Francisville, and the two brothers, Samuel and Benjamin White. The Masons of the U. S. S. Albatross identified themselves to the Masons of the Confederate army.

Up the bluff and into the little white wooden home of Feliciana Lodge No. 31, that still stands, but is a public library now, they bore the body, and over it they conducted the ancient funeral service of Masonry. Then to the cemetery in the churchyard of Grace Church, pitted with the shell holes from that dead officer's own guns, they went to the grave St. Francisville's Masons had dug. There, with Masonic ritual, they consigned all that was mortal of Lieutenant-Commander John E. Hart, United States Navy.

When the newly turned earth lay above the coffin the shore party of the Albatross saluted and departed for their gunboat, unmolested. The watching Confederates on the top of the bluff, amid the shell-shattered wreckage of what had been beautiful St. Francisville, saw the Albatross up-anchor, swing around and steam down the Mississippi river.

But that was not the end of this picture of Brotherly Love. Throughout the years the Masons of St. Francisville, and the Daughters of the Confederacy, kept that grave green and fresh, along with those of the Southerners. And in 1954 the Grand Lodge of Louisiana erected a monument over that grave replacing the simple head-stone that marked Brother Hart's last resting place.

To commemorate this historical event, the Grand Lodge of Louisiana invited the Virginia Craftsmen to its jurisdiction and St. Francisville. There, with appropriate ceremonies, a memorial service was held at the grave of John E. Hart on October 2, 1972. A wreath was laid at the head of the monument that covered the entire length of Hart's grave.

Found in the inscription of that monument are the words with which this story ends: "This monument is dedicated in loving tribute to the Universality of Freemasonry."

Many Masons in this story had found the beauty of this tie that appears to be peculiar to those who have learned the teachings of Freemasonry.

Let's go back three decades to the years of the anti-Masonic craze that started in 1826 and was particularly violent in the 1830s. This began with the supposed "murder" of one William Morgan. The anti-Masons used what was not a murder but a disappearance to crucify the Craft. They almost succeeded.

This wasn't the first attack on the Craft, nor will it be the last. It's prevalent today and getting more vicious all the time. These attacks were first recorded in 287 A.D. when four Masons were put to death by Diocletian. Their crime? They refused to build a pagan statue! Their fortitude has been commemorated by Quatuor Coronati Lodge, the London Lodge of Research.

After the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717 attacks became more vocal and the press then, as now, made more of them than they rated.

Even though these attacks continued, none were more disastrous than those of the 1830s in this country. It was particularly horrible in the East where hundreds of Lodges gave up their charters and thousands of Masons quit, many of them renouncing Freemasonry so they could take communion in their churches.

It was only in those states, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, where Masonry fought back that the critics were whipped to its credit, not a single Lodge in Rhode Island gave up its charter, but every Lodge in Vermont did. When Pennsylvania decided to not "turn the other cheek" any longer and fight, the craze quickly came to an end.

There were a few during that trying time who knew what this tie we're discussing was. One in particular was the Reverend George Taft, D.D., Minister of the First Baptist Church in the little village of Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Here's what the Grand Master of 1869 said of him:

Throughout the dark days of Anti-Masonry in RI he traveled throughout his state to conduct Masonic funerals -- braving the jeers and stones of the anti-Masons. He died on December 11, 1869, at the age of 78. The day he was carried to his grave, every business in the village of Pawtucket was closed, his church wouldn't hold all who wanted to attend the funeral. As his body was carried to the grave the bells of all the churches tolled his requiem, people all along the route openly wept.

The principles of a good man, a proud Master Mason, a devoted man of God, had proven stronger than the seeds of hate cast by unprincipled "clergymen" and politicians.

Then there was Andrew Jackson, a Past Grand Master of Masons in Tennessee, who refused to renounce Freemasonry although he was running for the presidency. He was elected and re-elected, proving again a man with principles will outlast the demagogues. Another man who had found this mysterious tie in Freemasonry.

Let's skip a century to Harry S. Truman, the foremost Master Mason of the Twentieth Century. It has taken a book to tell the Masonic story of Brother Truman, a Past Grand Master of Masons in Missouri.

His story is too typical of those who have found this beautiful "tie" in Freemasonry. It tells of hate, envy, jealousy, but underlying this--a tremendous love. He spent his life working for the people of America -- and Freemasonry.

You don't have to be a Mason to find this tie we've been discussing. Without question, Sam Walter Foss knew what it was. Listen again to these words:

Let me live in my house by the side of the road,  
Where the race of men go by--  
They are good, they are bad, they are weak, they are  
strong.

Wise, foolish--so am I;  
Then why should I sit in the scorner's seat,  
Or hurl the cynic's ban?  
Let me live in my house by the side of the road,  
And be a friend to man.

And listen again to the words of a man who may or may not have been  
a Mason, St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is  
hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light; and where there is  
sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so  
much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood  
as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in  
giving we receive, it is in pardoning that we are  
pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal  
life. Amen."

This peculiar tie has been called "The Mystic Tie," and perhaps  
rightly so. What is it? Only your heart can give you the answer.