

I DREAMED I DROVE DOWN A LONELY ROAD, straight, long, and empty. On either side were groves of oranges trees; row after row stretching back endlessly from the road with boughs heavy with the round, orange fruit. It was harvest time, and fruit was abundant.

My wonderment grew as the miles slipped by. How would the harvest be gathered? During all the hours I had driven, seldom had I seen another person. The groves were empty of people, with only an occasional orange picker here and there. However, far from the highway, on the distant horizon, lost in the vast wilderness of unpicked fruit, I could discern a tiny group of them working diligently. And many miles later, I saw one more group. It seemed an impossible task for the few scattered pickers. As fruit fell steadily from the trees, it seemed as though the earth were shaking with silent laughter at the hopelessness of the task.

Shadows were lengthening when, without warning, the road curved sharply and there was a sign: "Leaving Neglected Country...Entering Home Country." The contrast was truly startling.

People were everywhere and traffic was heavy. The orange trees were still there with oranges in abundance, but these orchards were filled with multitudes of people who

were happy and singing, in great contrast to the silence in the groves through which I had just driven.

I parked my car and mingled with the crowd. People were all in their expensive suits, fancy dresses, shiny shoes, and showy hats – everyone seemed so bright and fresh. It was a contrast to the old work clothes I was wearing.

"Is it a holiday?" I asked a well-dressed woman with whom I fell in step. She looked startled, then her eyes fell in condescension, "You're a stranger, aren't you?" Before I could reply, she went on, "This is Orange Day!" She must have seen my look, but continued proudly, "It's so good to turn aside from one's labors and pick oranges one day of the week."

"But don't you pick oranges EVERY day?" I asked.

"Oh yes, one must be ready to pick oranges always, but Orange Day is the specific day we set aside to do it," she answered.

I noticed that most of the people were carrying a book beautifully bound in leather, edged in gold, and entitled ORANGE PICKER'S MANUAL.

Around one of the orange trees, seats had been arranged in tiers and they were now almost full. A well-dressed man conducted me to a seat and gave me an Orange Picker's Program.

There were a great number of people gathering. One man up front began talking to the people, and soon they began to sing. The songbook was called SONGS OF THE ORANGE GROVES. As everyone sang, "Shall We Gather All the Oranges?" the man in front admonished us to sing louder.

I was puzzled. "When do we start to pick oranges?" I inquired of the man who shared the songbook with me.

"Oh, it's not long now," he told me. "We like to get everyone warmed up first...besides, we want to make the oranges feel right at home. I thought he was joking.

After a while, a rather well dressed man read two sentences from his well-worn copy of the ORANGE PICKER'S MANUAL and began to make a speech. I wasn't quite sure if he was talking to the people... or to the oranges.

I looked around and saw a number of similar groups gathered around other trees here and there, being addressed by what seemed to be "professional pickers." Still other trees had NO ONE around them... no one to pick fruit from them.

"Which trees do we pick from?" I asked the man beside me. He didn't seem to understand, so I pointed to the loaded trees around about us.

"Well, THIS is our tree," he emphasized.

"But there are too many of us to pick from just this ONE tree," I protested. "There are many more people than oranges!"

"We don't all pick oranges," the man patiently explained; "We haven't been called. That's the Head Orange Picker's job. We're here to support him. Besides, we haven't been to MANUAL SCHOOL. There's a lot to learn about oranges. Besides, you need to know how an orange thinks before you can pick it successfully... orange psychology, you know."

"So, what's MANUAL SCHOOL?" I whispered.

"It's where they go to study the ORANGE PICKER'S MANUAL," my informant went on; "it takes years to understand it, and then even more years personal training."

"I see," I murmured. "I had no idea that picking oranges was so difficult."

The man in front was still making his speech. His face was red and he seemed indignant about some of the other "orange-picking" rival groups. But then a glow came on his face, "But we are not forsaken," he said. "We have much to be thankful for. Why, just in the last twelve months we have seen three oranges brought into the baskets, and I'm sure you'll be happy to know that we are now debt free, having paid off all the new cushions that grace the chairs you sit on!"

"Isn't it wonderful?" the man next to me murmured. I made no reply. I felt that something must be profoundly wrong somewhere. All this seemed to be a very roundabout way of picking oranges.

the oranges, plucked them from the branch, and placed them in a basket at his feet. The applause was deafening!

"Now do we start picking oranges?" I asked my informant.

"What do you think we're doing?" he hissed. "Didn't you see those two oranges that we just picked? What do you think this tremendous effort has been made for? Why, thousands of dollars have been spent on the tree you're looking at; and, there's more orange-picking talent in this group than in the rest of Home Country combined!" he bragged.

I apologized quickly, "I don't want to be critical. The man in front must be an excellent orange picker. But certainly the rest of us could try picking, too! There are so many oranges that need picking. We've got hands; surely we can read the MANUAL!"

"Son, when you've done business as long as I have, you'll realize it's not that simple," he replied. "There isn't time. We have work to do, houses to look after, and families to care for, besides grooming the ground around this tree. We..."

But I wasn't listening. Light began to dawn on me. Whatever these people were, they were NOT orange pickers. Orange picking was some form of weekend activity reserved for a few.

I visited a few more of the other groups. Not all had such high academic standards, but some did hold classes on orange picking. I tried to tell them of the trees I had seen in Neglected

Country, but no one showed any interest. "We haven't even picked all the oranges here yet," was their usual reply.

The sun was setting as I drove back along that lonely road on which I had come. All around me were those same vast, empty orange groves. But there had been some changes...everywhere the ground was littered with fallen fruit; it seemed as though the trees had rained oranges to the ground, and now they lay there rotting. I said to myself, "No man cares for these oranges." Then I contemplated all the people back in Home Country.

Then, booming through the trees, there came a voice saying, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest."

Then I awakened, and found that it was only a dream.

In Matthew 9:36-38 we read this, "*But when He saw the multitudes, **He was moved with compassion on them**, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He unto His disciples, **The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest.***"

- Permission granted by the wife of Dr. John White and www.ntm.org

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The Parable of the Orange Trees

by Dr. John White

Workers Needed