

OPTIMISM

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R.W.Bro. John Forster, District Deputy Grand Master, Ottawa District 2

There's an old joke about a man about to be guillotined. As he lays his head on the block he sees a basket half full of heads. He starts to cry. "Cheer up," says the executioner, "look at it this way, the basket is half full not half empty."

We may be genetically divided between those who see the basket half full and those who see it as half empty. The fullers and the emptiers don't get along however. They clash regularly. You hear it every day how the world is going to hell in a hand basket (that is only half full) . The Earth is warming, the oceans will rise up and drown us, the trains are never on time, the health system is falling apart and there are epidemics of every disease known to man, many of which, have you noticed, are called silent killers.

I would have expected Masons to be immune to all this stuff. After all we all "solemnly swore upon our honour to cheerfully conform to the ancient usages and established customs of the order" before we even knew what they were.

Now that's optimism!

But wait a minute. Aren't we living longer? And healthier? And aren't we better off? When I was a boy poor people were really poor. They didn't have enough to eat, they lived in damp and derelict housing. Even in the 60's in medical school, we went on public health visits to houses with water running down the walls. No cable TV! They didn't even have running hot water. (We didn't have a third world in those days — we all lived in it!) Thousand's died of polio, they still were dying (in England) of smallpox, measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever. And it was not unusual to see a funeral procession carrying a little white coffin.

Golden wedding celebrations were almost unheard of and people were old when they were 70.

So it is getting better. Life that is. On average in Canada, we live until we are 82. Women a little longer than men. (If you don't believe that, go into any retirement home in Ottawa and ask the large group of old ladies sitting in the lounge how many men live there. And don't go alone onto an elevator with a group of them!

But gloom sells. It's even considered a positive and useful thing. Millions are made publishing books foretelling disaster and mayhem: unless we don't stop killing ourselves or start getting more medical tests or eating the right things or taking the right medicine or asking your doctor if this is right for you.

And it's all wrong. We are making more progress and faster progress than ever in history. Within 20 years the human life span will be increasing by more than 12 months every year. Think about the consequences of that.

When I first started preparing this talk the European financial system was collapsing. We were being told that old folk were proliferating madly (Really??) and would soon outnumber children. The streets would be full of grannies and we would have an acute shortage of nursing home beds and nannies for grannies.

But then I hear about one of our brethren jumping from an airplane to celebrate his 70th birthday. And then another for his 97th! Wow.

Not long ago this would have been unheard of.

So why am I so optimistic. And so cynical of the doom and gloom?

Well because of the rate of progress. What has enabled us to improve our lot?

I can say it in a word: sharing.

Quote from Thomas Jefferson: " He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening mine."

Genetically we are identical to the people who lived in caves. We are probably no more intelligent. They, like us, could identify a problem and think about solutions to it. They could look forward and identify upcoming hazards. Then create strategies to avoid them. The major difference is that they had few resources to do this and, more importantly, a much smaller group with whom to share ideas or solutions.

Today, ideas and solutions can be shared almost instantly with millions. In the 60's, a medical student needed a large library, a personal collection of books, subscriptions to journals and a good memory to access the information needed to qualify and then keep up with progress. Ten years ago, you could put all the equipment you needed to do the same thing on a desktop if you had about \$8000.

Today you can have a tiny device in your pocket that cost about \$200 that does the same thing. In my remote hospital in Northern Ontario in 2005, I could get a face-to-face consultation with an expert anywhere in the world who could see and talk to and examine the patient.

Within 30 years that tiny computer will more than likely be implanted into the doctor's body. And by a process using AI nano technology, and brain sharing, she will access information seamlessly.

(It will do wonders for Masonic ritual!)

Sharing of tools, Sharing of information, Sharing of genes by sexual reproduction.

We are Masons. We attend lodge meetings and in those meetings we share ideas. Good ideas. Ideas like the application of the ruler, the gavel, and the chisel to everyday life. We practice brotherly love, relief and truth, the four cardinal virtues, temperance, fortitude, prudence & justice

And then we go out into the World and we demonstrate those virtues daily. By so doing we are happy and communicate (or share) that happiness with others.

Brethren, we have a lot to be hopeful about. Optimism is in our souls. Let's share our happiness with others.