



Education Monthly

June 2013

Optimism

(from a paper originally presented at Chaudiere Lodge no. 264 in October 2010 by R.W.Bro. John Forster)

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 empty not half full "

We may be genetically divided between those who see the basket half full and those who see it as half empty. The fillers and the emptiers don't get along however. They clash regularly. You hear every day how the world is going to hell in a hand basket. 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 this. 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 some with water running down the walls. Thousands 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 life is getting better. On average in Canada, men live until we are 82; women a little longer. 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.

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.

Why am I so optimistic and so cynical of the doom and gloom? Because of the rate of progress.

What has enabled us to improve our lot? I can say it in a word: "sharing". Thomas Jefferson said, " 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."

Masonic Education

Genetically we are identical to the people who lived in caves. They, like us, could identify a problem and think about solutions to it. They could look forward and identify upcoming hazards and create strategies to avoid them. 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. Sharing of tools, Sharing of information, Sharing of genes. We are Masons. We attend lodge meetings and in those meetings we share ideas. Good 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 We then go out into the World and 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.

LONDON MASONIC CONFERENCE

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453 Dufferin Avenue
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Author of The Rifle and the Apron
And
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As usual I'd ask that you pass this edition on to as many masons as you can.

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