

## THE INNOCENT ASPECTS OF NOSTRADAMUS' SAYINGS

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-----Many people these days, when they hear the name "Nostradamus" often conjure-up images of a bearded old man who composed cryptic (almost confusing) poems which were predictions of gloom and doom. In this paper, I will try to refrain from any type of dark or ominous references. It is unfortunate that thrill-seeking and twisted Hollywood screenwriters and actors, coupled with buffs of suspense and mystery have depicted Nostradamus in such an unseemly and unflattering light. With such an overwhelming stereotypical reputation, it will be difficult for worthy scholars to isolate and remove the scuttlebutt and balderdash from the surface to debunk the underlying myths. There are some people who praise the work of Nostradamus, but as is often the case, he may have many, many more critics. The biases or prejudices against Nostradamus run deep. While it may be impossible to silence hecklers, it may be possible to enlighten scholars who have an open mind. I shall attempt to begin by stating the following:

Michel de Nostredame was born in the year 1503 (different sources say it was either December 14th or December 21st of that year) in the south of France. He died on the 2nd of July 1566 at the age of 62. His surname of Nostredame was eventually Latinized to Nostradamus. He attended various universities, including the University of Avignon and the University of Montpellier. He left Avignon when the university was forced to shut its doors due to the outbreak of the Bubonic Plague. Nostradamus traveled the countryside, experimenting with various herbal remedies thought to be a cure. His eight year odyssey was a struggle just to stay alive. His family was Roman Catholic; but they had Jewish origins. Nostradamus was a practicing physician ----yet he also had an interest in astronomy. Despite his hope to find a cure for "The Plague", his wife and children died of the dreaded disease in 1534.

Our Rosicrucian Society was founded by Father Christian Rosenkreutz, a Catholic monk with similar Jewish roots who was born circa 1378 and died in the year 1484 at age 106.

In a previous presentation, I noted the life of another mystic: Sigismund Albicus (1360- 1427) (these are the true dates, I made a typographical error with years in the earlier presentation). Sigmund Albicus was born in Moravia, but practiced medicine at Prague in today's modern Czech Republic...and amazingly, he also became the Catholic Archbishop of Prague in addition to being a Medical Doctor. Albicus was only eighteen years older than Rosenkreutz.....and both of them were contemporaries who lived during the same time-period. Nostradamus was born only fourteen years after the death of Rosenkreutz. So, these three men lived during roughly in the same broad time frame.

With such similar backgrounds, I believe it is likely that Father Christian Rosenkreutz and Sigismund Albicus knew each other. Both crisscrossed the areas of Germany, Bohemia, Austria and Italy. It would appear that Nostradamus was a dedicated student who gleaned a variety of subject-matter from a variety of source material. All three men sought higher learning, each achieved tangible academic letters of distinction, and all three were devout in their worship toward Almighty God. They all trod similar pathways in hopes of discovering cures for dreaded diseases. They only diverged on their individual perspective, commentaries, and individual ideas on practical applications with regard to Medicine, Education, and Spirituality.

Sigismund Albicus saw suffering and tried to heal it with a mixture of prayer and medical healing. Christian Rosenkreutz saw suffering and tried to heal it with a mixture of prayer, medical healing, and the diligent searches in hopes of gathering acquired wisdom; using a deeper mix of ancient philosophies as well as modern practices known in other cultures at that time --- to form a quasi-religious Order focusing on Medicine and Education while still being loyal servants of the Church.

By contrast, Michel de Nostredame (Nostradamus) saw suffering and initially tried to heal it with a mixture of prayer, medical healing, and by his own search for herbal cures for ailments of the human body. When his efforts often proved to be in vain and mired-down by his own human failures, he turned to rhythmic poems



or curious cryptic stanzas to appease the minds of the curious, to temporarily quell the insatiable hunger among those around him. In the dark days of the Great Plague, simply having a glimmer of hope or a bit of fore-warning, seemed to give great comfort to the minds of worried individuals--ranging from Kings to Commoners. Nostradamus carved out a living by catering to a mix of inquisitive people or frightened people who would eagerly pay to hear his words. Unfortunately, when you have people offering to pay for commentaries which initially began as "words of wisdom for the day," nearly all of them craved to hear more.. and more & more & more. Most people don't want to hear ---much less pay for ---the humdrum aspects of life: they want to hear jubilant predictions or hear dramatic or perilous predictions of times which lay ahead. Such pre-conceived notions started to tilt Nostradamus' cryptic poems in a new and different direction. He had to devise a tactic which would prime the pump, which would continually prompt ongoing demand for his 'insight'. The cloudy complexity of his Quatrains often left the listener either baffled or yearning for more. By doing so, the listener or "receiver" had to pay for more commentaries --oddly feeding the "hunger" of their curiosity, while simultaneously causing them to "thirst" on their own inquisitiveness. The forecasts eventually turned into riveting "predictions for the future" which often captivated the hearts and minds of people ...and such fascination continues to this very day. This simply proves the point that many people have an insatiable desire "to know," "to decipher," and most of all: to supposedly uncloak the future, before it would normally unfold. Mortal man has a quest for knowledge. But, some people covet the idea of possessing "inside information".

In today's grocery-stores and bookstores there are many so-called Tabloid magazines. They have large, bold headlines which spotlight "celebrities" or "scandals." Probably the best-selling tabloids focus on the best mix: "high-profile celebrity scandals." The most outrageous headlines still seem to capture the most attention. And, whatever creates the most attention: prompts the most readership numbers. Catchy headlines or startling predictions splashed across tabloids, newspapers, television-screens or our computer screens are noticed.....even by people who claim otherwise. Many people in supermarket checkout lines who say they refuse to buy such "trash" often secretly thumb through a few pages when they think nobody else is watching. They may be honest that they haven't purchased the periodical, yet their eyes are drawn to it...either partially or in-full. There is no sin in being curious. When I have a full buggy of groceries and if there is a long line of customers ahead of me, I have been guilty of glancing at popular periodicals myself. Yet, I am so frugal that such items do not prompt my subscribing..

It is a known fact of human nature: Curiosity is infectious...and one other fact remains in our modern world: - the curious customer usually isn't satisfied by bland reports. Customers still crave juicier and juicier stories. A maxim that was true in Nostradamus' time and is just as true today is: "Bad news generates interest and excitement" while Good news is often unreported, under-reported, or even ignored."

It is a sad fact that Nostradamus' name and his reputation, today, is perpetually linked to gloom and doom prognostications.

All three men cited above Albicus, Rosenkreutz, and Nostradamus offered the wisdom of a Sage. Sigismund Albicus and Christian Rosenkreutz often gave of themselves with little or no recompense. Rosenkreutz assumed more the role of a professor trying to arouse interest among his students who followed his brand of philosophy. Albicus assumed the role of a comforting clergyman. But, Nostradamus diverted by pitching words for payment as his livelihood, and he is remembered with awe or mocked with derision for his babbling predictions.

Nostradamus' sayings are divided into ten sections (called 'Centuries') (which refer to verses...not the number of years). And, oddly, one "Century" only had 42 four-line verses (called Quatrains)

..... In his "Century I" (1535), Nostradamus writes:

(Quatrain #1)

Being seated at night in secret study;  
Meditating alone upon the brass tripod:  
A minute flame comes forth from the solitude



Making successful that which should not be believed in vain.

Suppose I re-phrased it, to apply it to our study as Masonic Rosicrucians:

Being seated at night in secluded study;  
Meditating alone upon the brass tripod and tilting a telescope:  
A tiny star comes forth from the solitude  
Making my observation a reality which with the naked eye alone would otherwise be in vain.

Now that doesn't sound so mysterious or ominous --- Does it?

Nostradamus again in ( Quatrain #63):  
Pestilences extinguished, the world becomes smaller,  
for a long time the lands will be inhabited peacefully.  
People will travel safely through the sky (over) land and seas;  
then wars will start up again

This quatrain is so clear-cut and accurate in today's era of vaccinations against disease; purified water systems and helpful sanitation practices; as well as instant telecommunications and rapid land, sea, and air travel -- that it is simply a matter-of-fact statement of today's reality. And, as the Biblical injunction states: there will be wars and rumors of wars until the end of Time.

In "Century 14" (1555-1556), Nostradamus writes:

Sublime essence forever visible to the eye.  
Come to cloud the conscious mind for reasons of its own.  
Body and forehead together, senses and the overseeing ego become invisible  
As the sacred prayers diminish.

This is probably one illustration where Nostradamus' remarks are jejune and lack any kind of practical significance. However, his notation of a 'Sublime essence forever visible to the eye' could easily refer to a wide variety of things such as a person being awake, active, and doing their daily chores or routines at school; at work; or in Church . If that was the case, then any interruption (such as a daydream) could 'cloud the conscious mind'. When he speaks of when 'the sacred prayers diminish,' it could easily be said that the prayers didn't vanish --only the attention-span of the listener. Nearly all of us can confess to being "distracted" even during some important event...even in Church.

Lastly, Nostradamus' so-called "prophesies" may not actually be prophesies after all. It may just be sentimental ramblings of moodiness brought on by cloudy days, moonlit nights, and drifting thoughts. The following Quatrains tend to mention the four basic elements of nature: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. Nostradamus mentions various elements we find in the modern Periodic Tables in Chemistry. He also utilized his knowledge of planets and astronomy to form linkages between people, events, and circular timetables. Nostradamus knew that 'Venus' was associated with copper; the 'sun' with gold; and the planet 'Mercury' (Hermes) with mercury. I think it is highly significant that (as you will see at the conclusion of my presentation, that, in his "Century X") ---- Nostradamus speaks of peace and union.

In Quatrains, Century IX...#12  
So much silver of Diana and Mercury  
The images will be found in the lake:  
The sculptor looking for new clay,  
He and his followers will be steeped in gold.

#14: Dyers' caldrons put on the flat surface,  
Wine,honey, and oil, and built over furnaces:  
They will be immersed, innocent, pronounced malefactors,  
Seven of Bordeaux smoke still in the cannon.



#27: The forester, the wind will be close around the bridge.  
Received highly, he will strike the Dauphin.  
The old craftsman will pass through the woods in a company,  
Going far beyond the right borders of the Duke.

#51: Against the red ones sects will conspire,  
Fire, water, steel, rope through peace will weaken:  
On the point of dying those who will plot,  
Except one who above all the world will ruin.

#61: The plunder made upon the marine coast,  
In Cittanova and relatives brought forward:  
Several of Malta through the deed of Messina  
Will be closely confined poorly rewarded.

In Century X,  
#42: The humane realm of Anglican offspring,  
It will cause its realm to hold to peace and union.  
War half-captive in its enclosure.  
For long it will cause them to maintain peace.

As we all know from our study of world history and American history: The concept of "peace and union" is a very delicate condition to maintain. I never thought about it much until I read Nostradamus' archaic language that war is held "half-captive" by the enclosure of peace. In other words, strong armies and strong navies keep foes at bay. President John F. Kennedy said it well: "If we are strong, our strength will speak for itself. If we are weak, words will be no help."

Nostradamus' words (if viewed as 'predictions') are often criticized by those who seize upon every fault or error, no matter how small. President Abraham Lincoln probably sized it up best when he said: "If you look for the bad in people expecting to find it, you surely will." That is the stigma surrounding Nostradamus by most of today's literary world. As scholars and as Masonic Rosicrucians: we can debunk the myths and focus on the 'good' or redeeming qualities of the man by our researches. Nostradamus catered to the curious. It is said that he was given a small stipend by the populace of a village when he freely treated the sick during The Great Plague. Nostradamus only supplemented his income by his later writings. As scholars, we are not fortune-tellers, seers, revelators, prophets, nor psychics. Our study of the 'mystical' is always grounded by our faith in Almighty God and friendship toward our fellow man. As genuine scholars, without ulterior motives or evasive biases: let us gravitate toward those elements which are true, practical, worthy, charitable and beneficial to all mankind. The time-honored "Wisdom of History" may be more valuable than the fleeting poetic "Forecasts for the Future" in steering our destiny. People must be careful in what they believe, and careful of who they believe. If a statement is so vague or flimsy that it can be tilted or twisted to prove credibility of an author, it can just as equally and gratuitously be twisted or tilted in the inverse to mock or repudiate an author.

The words of men are often as invisible as the wind. However, meaningful results enable forceful words to have impact. Tragedies and calamities (such as tornadoes) come and go. Superficial people purporting to be "academics" or "scholars" often attempt to tie Nostradamus to a Crystal Ball or a Philosopher's Stone. They might as well rub his face in the mud, or tie a "ball and chain" around his reputation and sink his name in the depths of sheer mockery. I would urge genuine scholars to courteously, yet critically, view the more innocent and innocuous sayings of Nostradamus as his way of generating friendly commentary. As for the darker or more ominous verses attributed to Nostradamus: I would respectfully urge my fellow scholars to take a slower, polite approach, and view those more controversial Quatrains with a grain of salt. They may have meaning -- yet they may not carry the weight of being 'darkly authoritative'.....but using darker tones what we would view as theatrical make-up to dramatize times of sorrow or peril. Some verses are a simple mix of cluttered poetry, tinged with tidbits of such practical applications as one might find in chemistry or the Liberal Arts and Sciences; coupled with a dash of astrology to add another bit of flavor. Some people crave



spicy foods to please their palates. I would compare Nostradamus' words and their diverse interpretations as comparable to the taste of sweet wine or sour vinegar. Good taste lies with the beholder. Variety is indeed the Spice of Life.

Predicting today's literal storms (the weather) may be the bailiwick of modern meteorologists and weather-forecasters. Almost nobody today predict the "aftermath" of crises or devastation. Television weathermen only advise us of the POTENTIAL for severe weather. It is up to each of us whether we heed or ignore. It is up to us whether we blissfully stand outside or whether we take shelter. Just as TV weathermen (and women) have been wrong in their predictions....so has Nostradamus been wrong in some of his calculations. When the weatherman predicted only a 10% chance of rain, and it is raining outside, we laugh and chalk it up to human error. We need to be equally forgiving or charitable with Nostradamus. If everything was a certainty....nobody would seek advice or counsel on anything.

And if the study of Nostradamus teaches us anything: it shows that there is no replacement for human elbow-grease in working at improving our lot in life and governing our own matters. It starts at the individual level and works upward to the household-level, and then from the neighbors to the community... thence from the local townships to the counties ...and then from the cities and towns upward to the State and Federal Governments. "Earth" is much more than a 'planet' --It is literally "our world" which we share with others. This world is composed of good and bad elements as well as good and bad people. We can't get bogged-down solely by trying to predict the future. We need to live in "the here and now" and work toward making our little corner of the world a little better -- not just for ourselves, but for our friends, neighbors and our posterity ..and theirs. Human progress and achievement only occurs piece-by-piece and step-by-step. Setbacks happen. Impatient people want cues on the positives and negatives of life as to 'when it happens' and 'why it happens'.

Throughout his life, Nostradamus faced the hard task of eking-out a living on meager means and he had to continually please his listening audience. Back then, during his lifetime, Nostradamus had to leap the hurdles by essentially becoming a "seller of sayings" and the responsibility rested on him was "Caveat Venditor" (Let the Seller Beware). If Nostradamus failed in his task: he suffered personally: he would have had no listeners -and no listeners meant no customers/no buyers and a loss of income. Now, as the pages of history have turned onward, the balance-scales with regard to responsibility for listening and determining truth and veracity in his Quatrains have shifted from author to reader. Anyone today who reads a Quatrain does so voluntarily and freely. Nostradamus isn't around to sell his wares (although there are many modern hucksters trying to peddle their wares or by their false trading on the reputation of Nostradamus). People today need to be wary of imitators and only judge Nostradamus on their personal impression of him. If his words are "like a good book": enjoy what you can. If his words are unappealing, set them aside. It is your choice. For those people who want quick-fixes, easy answers, trite justifications, or the magical 'keys' to unlock the gateway to a fast track for inside information, they need to heed the old admonitions: "Caveat Emptor" (Buyer Beware). Patient and prudent people will content themselves by exerting due diligence, wise planning, and put forth an ample measure of daily Prayer to get them to "where they are heading" ----no matter when it occurs and regardless of how many obstacles get in the way. Nostradamus' words may give us comfort; but History marches on. We need to use our God-given talents to tell ourselves whether we're movers or shakers --- or whether we will be steamrolled by our failure to see the "Signs" by removing ourselves from the fates of ignorance or folly. Our own faith and deeds will dictate whether we march forward or whether we are left-behind.

Nostradamus' Quatrains have been quoted and misquoted over time. His verses have been repeated by sincere believers; and besmirched by staunch skeptics. In the end, his words are only that: 'words'. Nearly all human-beings who can talk: have opinions; and want their opinions to be heard and deemed relevant by others or to make a difference --large or small. Look at the number of people around today who make "New Year's Resolutions." It is almost a running-joke about how people regret making unrealistic weight-loss "promises" they can't keep. If we miss-the-mark and fail: we easily overlook it, forgive ourselves, chalk-it-up to overzealous exaggeration...and move-onward. We need to treat Nostradamus with that same level of kindness and forgiveness. We need to exhibit greater latitude and have a "Forgive, forget, and move-on" attitude. Whether Nostradamus' words were on-target or not...it is still up to people (then and now) to govern themselves accordingly.



There is a popular television commercial these days which begs the question, "What's in your wallet?" When it comes to our own life, how would we respond if someone barked-out: "What's ahead in your future?" Answering that is no simple task. Suddenly, we finally appreciate Nostradamus by putting ourselves in his shoes.

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Sources / Recommended Readings:

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Albert G. Mackey 33° and a KT.
- NOSTRADAMUS: The Complete Prophecies by John Hogue. Element Books Ltd., 1997, pages 167, 318.
- The Holy Bible: Matthew 24:6 and Mark 13:7

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