

flesh, and compelling us to magnify the Lord. The more unarmed and helpless Christians are, the surer will their step be, and their haste will be the haste of those who have heard great news. 'He hath showed might in his arm. . . . He hath put down the mighty from their seat. . . . He hath filled the hungry with good things'. A trust of this sort will make it possible for Christians to love all men, to wish to open the hearts of the enemies of the Church rather than to constrain them by force. Christians should no longer behave as timid virgins alone in a hostile world. The power of the Most High has overshadowed us and overshadows us still.

THE EDITOR.

FRUSTRATION

ITS CAUSE AND CURE

HAS there ever been such a general sense of frustration as the world is suffering from today? I think not. In Pagan times this state of mind was certainly unknown. People had bad luck, no doubt quite often, and keenly regretted it: but they never felt frustrated, for there was no basic, fundamental expectation which had got the bottom knocked out of it. Pagans knew that the gods were jealous and that a run of good luck and success was sure to break sooner or later. Or else, as the Hindu would put it, if he had a rough time, it was just his bad *Karma*; he was now merely paying in this life for the ill deeds he had committed in a previous one. Bad luck or bad *Karma* in neither case admitted of a sense of frustration.

In Christian times obviously there was no room for frustration either. What was this life but a vale of tears, a pilgrimage to one's true home in another world? And if one did not expect anything better, how could one feel frustrated? Even when Christendom came to pieces and life became more and more secularized and paganized, the concept of frustration was absent. The eighteenth century witnessed the discovery of steam power and the ushering-in of the machine age: soon God was declared to be a hypothesis which was no longer required, and man, instead of waiting for a better world beyond the grave, now began with his newly discovered powers to construct a better world right here. Steam, then electricity, then oil, were harnessed to become man's willing slaves, who would whisk him through space, would turn night into day, would make a thousandfold quicker and better the things he had hitherto been doing laboriously with his hands. Faith in progress and

ever more progress became the religion of the nineteenth century, especially after Darwin seemed to have explained how natural and inevitable it all was. Man was frightfully pleased with himself: he knew practically everything already, or at least would know it quite shortly; he was lord of the powers of nature and master of his destiny—he was going to clean up all the atavistic mess that still disfigured human society, as soon as he had overcome the few reactionaries that still tried to put a spoke in the wheel of Progress.

To the reader this may sound rather antediluvian: but it all happened not so very long ago really. I for one remember it as the mentality prevalent when I was young. Nobody certainly then had ever heard of 'frustration'. Disillusionment only began when the war of 1914-1919 ended, not in 'a world fit for heroes to dwell in', not in 'a world made safe for democracy' but in a world of economic bankruptcy on the one hand and of totalitarian dictatorship on the other. The atomic bomb has merely summed up as in a deadly epigram the growing disillusionment and turned it into a sense of terror and despair. Thus it is only during the last twenty-five years that the sense of 'frustration' has grown up and become general: frustration, because the very basis and foundation of the general faith in humanistic progress has proved a chimera. Having long ceased to believe in God, people who had believed in Man instead now came to realize that the brave new world they were all so busy constructing rested not on solid rock but on shifting sands. And so when the tempest broke and the floods rose the city of their dreams just collapsed.

'Little man, what now?' asked the author of a best-seller after the first war. What now—but a complete sense of frustration, a despair of ever finding something better than shifting sands, a hopeless conviction that there is no sense in doing anything anyhow. 'Cheer up, we'll all soon be dead', our soldiers said a quarter of a century ago. After Hiroshima, is there any more to be said? True, the masters of the Kremlin still try to persuade the people behind the Iron Curtain that the Golden Age is just round the corner of another few five-year plans—though from all accounts the intensity of faith in their words has considerably slumped of late. At all events, we are here not concerned with their problems, but with our own.

What has the Christian to say in the face of so much frustration and despair? That we must have faith in God, who permits everything for our good. Of course. But those who do not share our faith, though they may ask us to help their unbelief, do not find it easy to follow our admonition. Is there no way to render our faith more acceptable, more reasonable, to them? One ventures to think there

is, and to express even a surprise that one does not see it explained more often: which may be one's excuse for explaining it once more in one's own fashion.

Let us begin by stating that man, being a person, is self-subsisting and therefore his own maker and master—within two important limits. A human person does not begin himself and therefore depends for his very being on God; again, a human person does not in himself exhaust all the possibilities of his form and therefore depends on the rest of humanity for his completion. But within these two limits each human person makes or mars himself, as long as he is in this temporal life: once he enters eternity the processes of time cease for him and he remains what he has made himself—forever. Man begins to make himself, as soon as he becomes self-conscious, and he continues to make himself throughout his life on earth. He does so by the thoughts, words and actions, in which he expresses himself. He chooses his ends, he chooses the means towards that end, and thus contracts character-forming habits. Thus the child, the adolescent, the man or woman (mature or senile) gradually builds up his own personality. He may even pull down and start afresh, but the older he grows, the more his personality has already set, the more difficult it is to give his personality a new turn. Every right choice makes, every evil choice mars, the ideal personality which is the form of his personal existence.

God being the Supreme Good, and therefore supremely good, desires every human soul created by him to reach perfection. He therefore places every soul in time and space, so that by loving the good and hating evil he may reach the perfection for which he was created. Thus a human person throughout conscious life may be said to be at school: every day brings fresh problems for him to solve, fresh choices to make, fresh difficulties to surmount. Absolutely speaking, it does not matter very much what he does—just as it does not matter very much whether a scholar spoils the paper given to him, or the piece of school garden assigned to him. The teacher does not ask questions because he is ignorant of the replies, nor is the school greatly affected because a plot has produced weeds instead of flowers. Relatively speaking, of course, as we have tried to show, it matters very much indeed for the individual person concerned.

The main trouble with people today, it seems to us, is that they look upon this life, not relatively as a time of probation, as an opportunity for perfecting one's self, but absolutely, as if the heavens would fall in, if they did not hold them up. The French have a saying that one should take things seriously, but not tragically.

The great fault of modern men is to take life too tragically and at the same time not seriously enough. Without faith in God and without realization that one's whole eternity is at stake, man naturally does not take his life seriously enough, but fritters it away; instead of making the most of his time, he more often than not just tries to 'kill' it. At the same time his pride puffs him up to think that he is in charge of all the universe, and a few things besides and that they all depend on him alone. No wonder he is weighed down by his imaginary task and by a sense of frustration, when he sees that after all he cannot manage it. Pride; and after pride, despair.

To our semi-believing friends one would thus explain, psychologically, that modern man feels frustrated because he has taken on a job that is beyond him, but not beyond God. That the whole load will be lifted off his mind once he recognizes this, and that we are primarily here, not to build a new world, but to build up our own personality which will endure, such as we have made it, when all the present worlds will have relapsed into nothingness. That the tasks that confront us, domestically, nationally, or internationally; economically or professionally; intellectually or technically; spiritually or materially—that all these tasks which in varying degrees confront all of us must be tackled seriously, that we must each to our utmost take our share in solving the grave problems we have been given, so that love of God and of our fellow creatures may abound in the world. But that we should not be solicitous about the result: what matters is that we should have acquitted ourselves well in the circumstances in which we are placed. That this alone counts in the end and that the labourer in the vineyard called at the eleventh hour, who has made the most of that hour, will get the same reward of a perfect personality as the labourer who had to wrestle with an unresponsive soil bearing the heat and burden of a long day. That not the absolute result, not 'success', will count, but to what extent we have each one of us redeemed our time.

Does this, dear Neo-Pagan, not make sense? Is this not sweetly reasonable and does it not really explain life, yours and mine? Indeed, is this not more credible than the husks of materialist and pragmatist dogmas, on which you have tried to feed for so long? If I have succeeded in showing you this, I shall be well content: for you to accept it, not only as a quite reasonable hypothesis, but as true, cannot be my work, but only that of Grace.

H. C. E. ZACHARIAS.