

## Tradition and Industrialization

### The Plight of the tragic elite in Africa.

M. Chairman, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The hour is late and I am pressed for time. There is an accumulation of material that has emerged from this conference — there are many things in my mind that I want to say and I hardly know how and where to make a choice. I shall try to make three short remarks before moving into the body of my text. This afternoon, my old friend, Cedric Dover, from the United Kingdom, recalled a passage on nationalism that I had written quite a few years ago, — a passage on nationalism among American Negroes — M. Dover expressed the hope that this statement of mine on Black nationalism would remain valid for some decades to come.

At the time I wrote that short statement on Black nationalism, we American Negroes lived our lives in a bitterly hostile racial environment. We had to build our own black churches, our black schools, our black butchershops, our black hospitals, our black newspapers, black graveyards, and a black culture in general. In short, we had to construct black ghettos in which to live. Had we not built them, we would have perished. Since that time, however, our claims to humanity have found a great deal of implementation in American law backed by police and military action. I hope, and this is all that I can say about this matter at present, that that implementation in law and that police and military action on our behalf will continue. I would like to explain that the Black Nationalism that we, American Negroes, practised in America, and which we were forced to practise, was a reluctant nationalism, a proud and defensive one. If these implementations of American law continue, and, as they continue, that nationalism of itself will be liquidated. I hope, even though I wrote lines to justify Black Nationalism in America, that they need not remain valid for decades to come.

I don't think I need to say that I consider that the sentiments I expressed concerning nationalism are still valid for those areas of the world in which black people live under white domination, deprived of the vote, deprived of their language, and deprived of being master of their destiny.

I would like to say — I don't know how many of you have noticed it there have been no women functioning vitally and responsibly upon this platform helping to mold and mobilize our thoughts. This is not a criticism of the conference, it is not a criticism of anyone, it is a criticism that I heap upon ourselves collectively. When and

if we hold another conference — and I hope we will — I hope there shall be an effective utilization of Negro womanhood in the world to help us mobilize and pool our forces. Perhaps some hangover of influence from the past has colored our attitude, or perhaps this was an oversight. In our struggle for freedom, against great odds, we cannot afford to ignore one half of our manpower, that is, the force of women and their active collaboration. Black men will not be free until their women are free.

I have spent most of my adult life and most of my waking hours brooding upon the destiny of the race to which I belong by accident of birth and by accident of history. I have been long associated with *Présence Africaine*; I have been intimately associated with this conference and worked with it. When I was asked to write a paper, I readily consented. This summer while in Normandy, I sat down my thoughts. The paper you see here is a result of that effort. I have not changed a line in this paper. But, yet, when I came to this conference, certain impressions, profound and irrefutable, certain ideas occurred to me, certain kinds of realities emerged which has compelled me to want to modify some of the formulations in the latter part of my discourse. I had thought of going home and doing this, but that would have meant my remaining out of the sessions. But the sessions gripped me because of their interest. Finally, in my dilemma, I decided that the best thing I could do — in order to be honest — was to correct my paper as I read it, in public. Some of my formulations and conclusions went beyond the reality that has emerged here and some fell short of that reality. I would like, if you will permit me, to try to form a focus of my formulations in your presence. This, I think, is the only honest way for me to do it, and the only honest thing for me to do. Especially do I want to emphasize the lack of objectivity of attitude which has characterized these sessions. Without more ado I shall proceed and, midway in my text, when I start criticizing my own formulations, I hope you would understand what I am trying to do.

So great a legion of ideological interests is choking the atmosphere of the world today that I deem it wise to define the terms in which I speak and for whom. All public utterances these days are branded for and against something or somebody. And especially is this true of us who have been doomed to act and live and speak in a web of racial, political, and economic facts.

Knowing the charged climate in which we all live, I, as a Western man of color, strive to be as objective as I can when I seek to communicate. But, at once, you have the right to demand of me: What does being objective mean? Is it possible to speak at all and not have the meaning of one's words construed in six different ways? I hope that my answer will be objective enough to illustrate the meaning of objectivity. First of all, let us admit that there is no such thing as objectivity, no such objective fact as objectivity. Objectivity is a fabricated concept, a synthetic construction devised to enable others to know the general conditions under which one has done something, or observed the world or an event in that world.

So, before proceeding to give my opinions concerning Tradition

and Industrialization, I shall try to state as clearly as possible where I stand, the mental climate about me, the historic period in which I speak, and some the elements in my environment and my own personality which propel me to communicate. The basic assumption behind all so-called objective attitudes is this: If others care to assume my mental stance and duplicate the atmosphere in which I speak, if they can imaginatively grasp the factors in my environment and the impulses motivating me, they will be able to see, more or less, what I've seen, will be able to apprehend the same general reality. By stating the assumptions behind my statements, I'm striving to convert you to my outlook, to the generality and reasonableness of my argument.

Obviously no striving for an objectivity of attitude is ever complete. Tomorrow or the day after someone will discover an element or a nuance that I've forgotten to take into account, and my attitude will have to be revised, discarded, or extended, as the case may be. Hence, there is no such thing as an absolute objectivity of attitude. The most rigorously determined attitude of objectivity is, at best, relative. We are human; we are slaves of time and circumstance; we are the victims of our passions and illusions. The most that our critics can ask of us is: Have you taken your passions, your illusions, your time, your circumstance into account? That is what I am attempting to do. More than that no reasonable man of good will could demand.

First of all, my position is a split one. I'm black. I'm a man of the West. These hard facts condition, to some degree, my outlook. I see and understand the West; but I also see and understand the non — or anti-Western point of view. How is this possible? This double vision of mine stems from my being a product of Western civilization and from my racial identity which is organically born of my being a product of that civilization. Being a Negro living in a white Western Christian society, I've never been allowed to blend, in a natural and healthy manner, with the culture and civilization of the West. This contradiction of being both Western and a man of color creates a distance, so to speak, between me and my environment. I'm self-conscious. I admit it. Yet I feel no need to apologize for it. Hence, though Western, I'm inevitably critical of the West. My attitude of criticism and detachment is born of my position. Me and my environment are one, but that oneness has in it, at its very heart, a schism. I regard my position as natural, though others, that is, Western whites, would have to make a most strenuous effort of imagination to grasp it.

Yet, I'm not *non-Western*. I'm no enemy of the West. Neither am I an Easterner. When I look out upon these vast stretches of this earth inhabited by brown, black, and yellow men, — sections of the earth in which religion dominates the emotional and mental landscape — my reactions and attitudes are those of the West. I see both worlds from another and third point of view. (This outlook has nothing to do with any so-called Third Force; I'm speaking largely in psychological terms.)

Since I'm detached from, because of racial conditions, the West, why do I bother to call myself Western at all? What is it that prompts me to make an identification with the West despite the contradiction involved? The fact is that I really have no choice in the matter. Historical forces more powerful than I am

have shaped me as a Westerner. I have not consciously elected to be a Westerner ; I have been made into a Westerner. Long before I had the freedom to choose, I was molded a Westerner. It began in childhood. And the process continues.

Hence, standing shoulder to shoulder with the Western white man, speaking his tongue, sharing his culture, participating in the common efforts of the Western community, I say to that white man : « I'm Western, just as Western as you are, maybe more ; but I don't completely agree with you. »

What do I mean, then, when I say I'm Western ? I shall try to define what that term means to me. I shan't here, now, try to define what being Western means to all Westerners. I shall confine my definition only to that aspect of the West with which I identify, that aspect that makes me feel and act Western.

The content of my Westernness resides fundamentally, I feel, in my secular outlook upon life. I believe in a separation of Church and State. I believe that the State possesses a value in and for itself. I feel that man — just sheer brute man just as he is — has a meaning and value over and above all sanctions or mandates from mystical powers either on high or from below. I am convinced that the humble, fragile dignity of man, buttressed by a tough-souled pragmatism, implemented by methods of trial and error, can sustain and nourish human life, can endow it with sufficient meaning. I believe that all ideas have a right to circulate without restriction. I believe that all men should have the right to have their say without fear of the « powers that be », without having to dread punitive measures of other men or the threat of invisible forces which some castes of men claim as their special domain, — men such as priests and Churchmen. (My own position compels me to grant those priests and Churchmen the right to have their say, but not at the expense of having my right to speak annulled.) I believe that art has its own autonomy, an independence that extends beyond the spheres of political or priestly powers. I feel that science exists without any *a priori* or metaphysical values. I feel that human personality is an end in and for itself. In short, I believe that man, for good or ill, is his own ruler, his own sovereign. I hold human freedom as a supreme right and good for all men.

These are my assumptions, my values, my morality, if you insist upon that word. Yet I hold these values at a time in history when they are threatened. I stand in the middle of that most fateful of all the world's centuries : the 20th Century. Nuclear energy, the center of the sun, is in the hands of men. In most of the land-mass of Asia and Africa the traditional and customary class relations of feudal, capitalistic societies have been altered by murder and terror. Most of the governments of the earth today rule, by one pretext or another, by pressure upon the individual, by fiat, secret police, and machine guns. Among intellectual circles the globe over the desperate question has been raised : « What is man ? » In the East as in the West, wealth and the means of production have been taken out of private hands, families, clans, and placed at the disposal of committees and state bureaucrats. The consciousness of most men on earth is filled with a sense of shame, of humiliation, memories of past servitude and degradation, — a sense of fear that the periods of servitude and degradation will

return. The future for most men is an apprehensive void which has to be filled, created anew at all costs. With the freeing of Asia and most of Africa from Western rule, more active religion now foment and agitates the minds of men than at any time since 1455! Man's world today lies in the Pythonlike coils of vast irrational forces which man cannot control. — This is the mental climate out of which I speak, a climate that tones my being and pitches my consciousness on a certain plane of tension. These are the conditions under which I speak, — conditions that condition me.

Now the above assumptions and facts would and do color my view of history, that record of the rise and fall of traditions and religions. All of these past historical forces which have, accidentally or intentionally, helped to create the basis of freedom in human life, I extol and count as my allies. These conditions of life and of history which thwart, threaten, or degrade the values and assumptions I've listed, I reject and consider harmful.

Naturally a man holding such values will view history in a rather novel light. How do these values compel me to regard the claims of Western imperialism? What virtue or evil do I assign to the overrunning of Asia and Africa by Western Christian white men? What about color prejudice? What about the undeniable technical and industrial power and superiority of the white West? How do I feel about the white man's vaunted claim — and I'm a product, reluctant, to be sure, of that white man's culture and civilization — that he has been called by his God to rule over the world and to have all overriding considerations over the rest of mankind, that is, colored men?

And since religion, by and large, has tacitly endorsed racism, how do I view religion, any religion whether in Europe, Asia, or Africa? And since tradition is generally but forms of frozen or congealed religions, how do I regard tradition...?

I've tried to lead you to my angle of vision slowly, step by step, keeping nothing back. If I insist over and over again upon the personal perspective, it is because my weighing of external facts is bound organically with that personal perspective. My point of view is a Western one, but a Western one that conflicts at several vital points with the outlook of the West! Am I ahead of or behind the West? My judgment is that I'm ahead. And I do not say that boastfully; such a judgment is implied by the very nature of those Western values that I hold dear.

Let me dig deeper into my personal position. I was born a black Protestant in the most racist of all the American states: Mississippi. I lived my childhood under a racial code, brutal and bloody, that white men said was ordained of God, said was made necessary by their religion. Naturally, I rejected that religion and would reject any religion that prescribes for me an inferior position in life; I reject that tradition and any tradition that proscribes my humanity. Since the very beginnings of my life on this earth were couched in this contradiction, I became passionately curious as to why Christians felt it mandatory to practice such wholesale denials of humanity. My seeking carried me back to a crucial point in Western history where a clearly enunciated policy on the part of the Church spelt my and others' doom. In 1455 the Pope divided the world between Spain and Portugal and decreed

that these two nations had not only the right, but the bounden duty of enslaving all infidels. Now, it just so happened at that time that all the infidels, from the white Christian point of view, were in Asia and Africa and the many islands of the Atlantic and Pacific ; — and it just so happened that they were all people of color.

Further reading of history brought me abreast of a strong current of opposition to that Church that had condemned all colored mankind. When I discovered that John Calvin and Martin Luther were stalwart rebels against the domination of a Church that had condemned and damned the majority of the human race, I felt that the impulses animating them were moving in the direction of a fuller concept of human dignity and freedom. But the Protestantism of Calvin and Luther did not go far enough; they underestimated the nature of the revolution they were trying to make. Their fight against the dead weight of tradition was partial, limited. Racism was embedded in their rejection of the claims of the Church that they sought to defeat. Calvin and Luther wanted freedom, but only for their kind, that is, European whites. So, while recognizing the positive but limited nature of Calvin's and Luther's contribution, I had to look elsewhere for a concept of man that would not do violence to my own concept of life.

Strangely, the ultimate consequences of Calvin's and Luther's rebellious doctrines and seditious actions unwittingly created and fertilized the soil out of which grew something that Calvin and Luther did not dream of. (And this is not the first time that I shall call your attention to an odd characteristic of the Western world ; the men of Europe seem prone in their actions to achieve results that contradict their motives. Europeans have a genius for calling things by wrong names ; they seek to save souls and they become involved in murder; they attempt to enthrone God as an absolute and they thereby establish the prerequisites of science and atheistic thought ; they seem wedded to a terribly naive and childlike view of the world and themselves and they are filled with consternation when their actions produce results that they did not foresee.) Determined to plant the religious impulse in each individual's heart, declaring that each man has the right to stand face to face with God, Calvin and Luther blindly let loose mental and emotional forces which, in turn, caused a vast revolution in the social, cultural, governmental, and economic conditions under which Europeans lived, — a revolution which finally negated their own implied racial attitudes !

The first and foremost of these conditions were the guaranteeing of individual conscience and judgment, an act which loosened, to a degree, the men of Europe from custom and tradition, from the dead hand of the past, evoking a sense of future expectation, infinitely widening man's entire horizon. And yet this was achieved by accident ! That's the irony of it... Calvin and Luther, preoccupied with metaphysical notions, banished dread from men's minds and allowed them to develop that courage which enabled them to amass a vast heap of positive fact relating to daily reality. As a result of Calvin's and Luther's heresy, man began to get a grip upon his external environment. Science and industry were born and, through their rapid growth, each enriched the other and nullified the past notions of social structures, negated norms of nobility, of tradition, of priestly values, and fostered



new social classes, new occupations, new structures of government, new pleasures, hungers, dreams, in short, a whole new and unheard of universe. A Church world was transformed into a worldly world, any man's world, even a world in which black, brown, and yellow men could have the possibility to live and breathe.

Yet, while living with these facts, Europe still believed in and practiced racism, a racism that the very logic of the world they were creating told them was irrational and insane !

Buttressed by their belief that their God had entrusted the earth into their keeping, drunk with power and possibility, waxing rich through trade in commodities, human and non-human, with awesome naval and merchant marines at their disposal, their countries filled with human debris anxious for any adventures, psychologically armed with new facts, white Western Christian civilization, with a long, slow, and bloody explosion, hurled itself upon the sprawling masses of humanity in Asia and Africa.

Perhaps now you'll expect me to pause and begin a vehement and moral denunciation of Europe. No. The facts are complex. In that process of Europe's overrunning of the rest of mankind a most bewildering mixture of motives and means took place. White men, spurred by religious and areligious motives, — that is, to save the souls of a billion or so heathens and to receive the material blessings of God while doing so — entered areas of the earth where religion ruled with an absoluteness that did not even obtain in Europe. Are we here confronted with a simple picture of villainy triumphing over virtue, of right over wrong, of the superior over the inferior, of the biologically fit blond beast over biologically botched brown, yellow, and black men ? That is what Europe felt about it. But I do not think that that is a true picture of what really happened. Again I call your attention to the proneness of white Europe's doing one thing and calling that thing by another name.

What, then, happened ? Irrationalism met irrationalism.

(I would like to pause here and try to fill a slight gap in this paper and I will try to do it as quickly and in as foreshortened a manner as possible. Some few thousand years ago somewhere in the mountains of Greece, a mood overcame some poor Greek hunter or farmer. Instead of the world that he saw being full of life born of his own psychological projections, it suddenly happened that he saw it bleakly and bluntly for what it was. The mood of objectivity was born and we do not know on what date. But we find its reality in Greek life and in Greek art. This idea of objectivity was a seed-idea that slept on in Western culture and did not come to full growth until religion had been pushed back in Europe to a degree that allowed it to flower in science and industry. When the idea of objectivity was being explored in Greece, Egypt and most of Africa were wrapped in ancestor religions, powerful religions, sensitive and vital. Who knows but what Africa too had not discovered the idea of objectivity ? But maybe the occasion for its application never came. I mention this to show that the heritage of the irrational confronting us is not a black heritage or a white heritage, but a human heritage. And he who first discovered objectivity no doubt discovered it by acci-

dent, and the possession of this attitude of objectivity demonstrates no superiority or inferiority.)

The irrationalism of Europe met the irrationalism of Asia and Africa, and the resulting confusion has yet to be unraveled and understood. Europe called her adventure imperialism, the spread of civilization, missions of glory, of service, of destiny even... Asians and Africans called it colonialization, blood-sucking, murder, butchery, slavery, etc. There is no doubt but that both sides had some measure of truth in their claims. But I state that neither side quite knew what was happening and neither side could state the real process that was taking place. The truth lay beyond the blurred ken of both the European and his Asian and African victim.

I have stated publicly, on more than one occasion, that the spoils of European imperialism do not bulk so large or important to me. I know that today it is the fashion to list the long and many economic advantages that Europe gained from its brutal and bloody impact upon the hundreds of millions of Asians and Africans. The past fifty years have created a huge literature of the fact that the ownership of colonies paid princely dividends. I have no doubt of it. Yet that fact does not impress me as much as still another and more obscure fact. What rivets my attention in this clash of East and West is that an irrational Western world helped, unconsciously and unintentionally, to smash the irrational ties of religion and custom and tradition in Asia and Africa ! **THIS, IN MY OPINION, IS THE CENTRAL HISTORIC FACT !** The European said that he was saving souls, yet he kept himself at a distance from the brown, black, and yellow skins that housed the souls he so loved and wanted so badly to save. Thank the white man's God for that bit of racial and color stupidity ! His liberating effect upon Asia and Africa would not have been so thorough had he been more human...

Yes, there were a few shrewd Europeans who wanted the natives to remain untouched, who wished to see what they called the « nobility » of the black, brown, and yellow lives remain intact. The more backward and outlandish the native was, the more the European loved him. This attitude can be boiled down to one simple wish : the imperialist wanted the natives to sleep on in their beautifully poetic dreams so that the ruling of them could be done easily. They devised systems of administration called « indirect rule », assimilation, gradual constitutional government, etc... but they all meant one simple thing : a white man's peace, a white man's order, a white man's tranquility, and a white man's free trade.

Again, I say that I do not denounce this. Had even the West known what it was really doing, it could not have done a better job of liberating the masses of Asia and Africa from their age-old traditions. Being ignorant of what they were really doing, the men of Europe failed to fill the void that they were creating in the very heart of mankind, thereby compounding the felony.

There are Europeans today who look longingly and soulfully at the situation developing in the world and say : « But, really, we loved'em. They were our friends. » To attitudes like that I can only say : « My friend, look again. Examine the heritage you left behind. Read the literature that your fathers and your fathers'



fathers wrote about those natives. Your fathers were naive but honest men. »

. How many souls did Europe save ? To ask that question is to make one laugh ! Europe was tendering to the great body of mankind a precious gift which she, in her blindness and ignorance, in her shortsightedness, was not generous enough to give her own people ! Today, a knowing black, brown, or yellow man can say :

« Thank you, Mr White Man, for freeing me from the rot of my irrational traditions and customs, though you are still the victims of your own irrational customs and traditions ! »

(Now, at this point, I shall begin some self-criticism. I wondered at this conference, when I heard delegate after delegate rise and speak, if we were sufficiently beyond the situation in which we have been hurt to permit my making an ironic statement of that sort. I wrote this paper up in the country, projecting an ideal room filled with secular-minded Africans more or less like myself in outlook. (I am trying to bring my paper into focus with the reality that has emerged from this conference.) I felt that I could easily make a statement like that. Being an American Negro with but few lingering vestiges of my irrational heritage in *both* America and Africa, I felt that I could be intellectually detached. But I place a question mark, in public, behind that statement.)

There was a boon wrapped in that Western gift of brutality. Over the centuries, meticulously, the white men took the sons and daughters of the chiefs, of the noble houses of Asia and Africa and instilled in them the ideas of the West. They had no thought about how these men would fare when cast, like fishes out of water, back into their poetic cultures. Shorn of all deep-seated faiths, these Westernized Asians and Africans had to sink or swim with no guides, no counsel. Over and above this, the Europeans launched vast industrial enterprises in almost all of the lands that they controlled, enterprises that wrought profound alterations in the Asian-African ways of life and thought. In sum, the Europeans set off a more deep-going revolution than had ever obtained in all of the history of Europe. And they did this with supreme confidence. On one occasion Christian Englishman chartered a company for one thousand years to deal in black slaves... ! Oh, what hope they had !

I would like to question the statement I have just made when I said that the Europeans had set off in Africa a more deep-going revolution than had obtained in Europe. As a result of this conference, I know that the masses of Africa are in motion. Just what kind of a revolution is taking place and what level that revolution has reached, I cannot say. What direction will revolution take ? Will it be akin to the West or, will it have notions of its own ? I do not know.

Who *took* here ? Who *gave* ? It is too complicated a process to admit of such simple questions. But the Europeans naively called it soul-saving, money-making, modern administration, missions of civilization, *Pax Britannica*, and a host of other equally quaint appellations. History is a strange story. Men make history with one set of motives and the consequences that flow from their motives have nothing whatsoever to do with those motives. What irony will history reveal when these pages of Europe's domina-

tion of Asia and Africa are finally and honestly written ! That history will depict a ghastly racial tragedy ; it will expose a blind spot on the part of white Westerners that will make those who read that history laugh with a sob in their throats. The white Western world until relatively recently the most secular part of the earth — a secularity that was the secret of its power (science and industry) labored unconsciously and tenaciously for five hundred years to make Asia and Africa (that is, the elite in those areas) more secular-minded than the West !

As a result of my being here at this conference, I question this statement. When I wrote that statement, I was hoping and dreaming, for black freedom. But after listening to the gentleman of the cloth who spoke here this morning describe the African as being incurably religious, I wonder now if I can say that the African is more secular-minded than the West. Will there be a latching on of Western techniques at some point of African religious development ? I am honest enough to react to the reality before me and show you how my formulations went wide of the mark or under the mark. One must try to govern one's own emotions and perceptions and relate them to reality.

In the minds of hundreds of millions of Asians and Africans the traditions of their lives have been psychologically condemned beyond recall. Millions live uneasily with beliefs of which they have been made ashamed. I say, « *Bravo !* » for that clumsy and cruel deed. Not to the motives, mind you, behind those deeds, motives which were all too often ignoble and base. But I do say, « *Bravo !* » to the consequences of Western plundering, a plundering that created the conditions for the possible rise of rational societies for the greater majority of mankind.

But enough of ironic comparisons. Where do we stand today ? That part of the heritage of the West that I value has now been established as lonely bridgeheads in Asia and Africa in the firm of a Western educated elite, an elite that is more Western than the West...

(Again I must check and correct my perceptions against the reality, mainly religious in nature, that has emerged from this conference.)

Tragic and lonely and all too often misunderstood are these men of the elite. The West hates and fears that elite and I must, to be honest, say that the instincts of the West that prompts that hate and fear are, on the whole, correct. For this elite in Asia and Africa constitutes islands of free men, the FREEST MEN IN ALL THE WORLD TODAY. They stand poised, nervous, straining at the leash, ready to go, with no weight of the dead past clounding their minds, no fear of foolish customs benumbing their consciousness, eager to build industrial civilizations.

I wonder, as a result of this conference, whether my description was idealistic or factual. I think that if more material could have emerged from this conference, and had we had more discussions, I could make a judgment. As it is, I cannot judge at this moment.

What does this mean ? It means that the spirit of the Enlightenment, of the Reformation which made Europe great now has a chance to be extended to all mankind ! A part of the non-West is now akin to a part of the West. East and West have become

confounded. The partial overcoming of the forces of tradition and oppressive religions in Europe resulted, in a roundabout manner, in a partial overcoming of tradition and religion in decisive parts of Asia and Africa. The unspoken assumption in this history has been : WHAT IS GOOD FOR EUROPE IS GOOD FOR ALL MANKIND ! I say : So be it.

I agree with what has happened. My only regret is that Europe could not have done what she did in a deliberate and intentional manner, could have planned it as a global project. My wholehearted admiration would have gone out to the spirit of a Europe that had had the imagination to have launched this mighty revolution out of the generosity of its heart, out of a sense of lofty responsibility Europe could then stand proudly before all the world and say : « Look at what we accomplished ! We remade man in our image ! Look at the new forms of life that we brought into being ! » And I'm sure that had that happened, the majority of mankind would have been European in a sense that no atom or hydrogen bombs can make a man European... But, alas, that chance, that rare opportunity, is gone forever. Europe missed the boat.

How can the spirit of the Enlightenment and the Reformation be extended now to all men ? How can this boon be made global in effect ? That is the task that history now imposes upon us. Can a way be found to merge the rational areas and rational personnel of Europe with those of Asia and Africa ? How can the curtains of race, color, religion, and tradition — all of which hamper man's mastery of his environment — be collectively rolled back by free men of the West and non-West ? Is this a Utopian dream ? Is this more wishing ? No. It is much more drastic than that. The nations of Asia and Africa and Europe contain too much of the forces of the irrational for anyone to think that the future will take care of itself. The islands of the rational in the East are too tenuously held to permit of optimism. And the same is true of Europe. (We have but to recall reading of ideas to « burn up entire continents » to doff our illusions. The truth is that our world — a world for all men, black, brown, yellow, and white — will either be all rational or totally irrational. For better or worse, it will eventually be one world...

How can these rational regions of the world be maintained ? How can the pragmatically useful be made triumphant ? Does this entail a surrender of the hard-bought national freedoms on the part of non-Western nations ? I'm convinced that that will not happen, for these Asian and African nations, led by Western educated leaders, love their freedom as much as the West loves its own. They have had to struggle and die for their freedom and they value it passionately. It is unthinkable that they, so recently freed from color and class domination of the West, would voluntarily surrender their sovereignty. Let me state the problem upsidedown. What Western nation would dream of abdicating its sovereignty and collaborating with powers that once so recently ruled them in interests that were not their own, — powers that created a vast literature of hate against them ? Such an act would be irrational in the extreme. And the Western educated leaders of non-Western nations are filled with too much distrust of an imperial-minded West to permit of any voluntary relinquishing of their control over their destinies.

Is there no alternative? Must there be a victorious East or a victorious West? If one or the other must win completely, then the fragile values won so blindly and accidentally and at so great a cost and sacrifice will be lost for us all. Where is the crux of this matter? Who is to act first? Who should act first? The burden of action rests with the West, I say. For it was the West that began this vast process. And of what must the action of the West consist? It must aid and, yes, abet the delicate and tragic elite in Asia and Africa to establish rational areas of living. THE WEST, IN ORDER TO KEEP BEING WESTERN, FREE, RATIONAL, MUST BE PREPARED TO GIVE TO THE ELITE OF ASIA AND AFRICA A FREEDOM WHICH IT ITSELF NEVER PERMITTED IN ITS OWN DOMAIN. THE ASIAN AND AFRICAN ELITE MUST BE GIVEN THEIR HEADS! The West must perform an act of faith and do this. Such a mode of action has long been implied in the very nature of the ideas which the West has instilled into that Asian-African elite. The West must trust that part of itself that it has thrust into Asia and Africa. Nehru, Nkrumah, Nasser, Sukarno, and the Western educated chiefs of these newly created national states must be given *carte blanche* right to modernize their lands without overlordship of the West, and we must understand the methods they will feel compelled to use.

Never, you will say. That is impossible, you will say. Oh, I'm asking a hard thing and I know it. I'm Western, remember, and I know how horrible my words sound to Westerners so used to issuing orders and having those orders obeyed at gun point. But what rational recourse does the West possess other than this? None.

If the West cannot do this, it means that the West does not trust itself, does not trust the ideas which it has cast into the world. Yes, Sukarno, Nehru, Nasser and others will use dictatorial methods to hasten the process of social evolution and to establish order in their lands, — lands which were left voids by a long Western occupation and domination. Why pretend to be shocked at this? You would do the same if you were in their place. You have done it in the West over and over again. You do it in every war you fight, in every crisis, political or economic, you have. And don't you feel and know that, as soon as order has been established by your Western educated elite, they will, in order to be powerful, surrender the personal power that they have had to wield?

Let us recognize what our common problem really is. Let us rethink what the issue is. This problem is vast and complicated. Merely to grasp it takes an act of the imagination. This problem, though it has racial overtones, is not racial. Though it has religious aspects, is not religious. Though it has strong economic motives, is not wholly economic. And though political action will, no doubt, constitute the means, the *modus operandi*, the problem is not basically political.

The problem is freedom. How can Asians and Africans be free of their stultifying traditions and customs and become industrialized, and powerful, if you like, like the West...?

I say that the West cannot ask the elite of Asia and Africa, even though educated in the West, to copy or ape what has happened in the West. Why? Because the West has never really

been honest with itself about how it overcame its own traditions and blinding customs.

Let us look at some examples of Western interpretation of its own history. A Civil War was fought in America and the American school children are taught that it was to free black slaves. It was not. It was to establish a republic, to create conditions of economic freedom, to clear the ground for the launching of an industrial society. (Naturally, slavery had to go in such a situation. I'm emphasizing the positive historic aspects, not the negative and inevitable ones!) The French fought a long and bloody Revolution and the French school children are taught that it was for Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Yet we know that it was for the right of a middle class to think, to buy and sell, to enable men with talent to rise in their careers, and to push back (which was inevitable and implied) the power of the Church and the nobility. The English, being more unintentionally forthright than others, never made much bones about the fact that the freedom that they fought for was a freedom of trade.

Do these misinterpretations of Western history by the West negate the power and net gains of the Western World? No. It is not what the West said it did but what the results really were that count in the long run.

Why have I raised these points of Western contradictions? Because, when non-Westerners, having the advantage of seeing more clearly — being psychologically outside of the West — what the West did, and when the non-Westerners seek to travel the same road, the West raises strong objections. I've had a white Westerner tell me: « You know, we must stay in Africa to protect the naked black natives. If we leave, the blacks we have educated will practice fascism against their own people. » So this man, was in a position to endorse the shooting down of a black elite because that black elite wanted to impose conditions relating to the control of imports and exports, something which his country practiced every day!

The same objections are leveled against Nkrumah in the Gold Coast, against Sukarno in Indonesia, against Nasser in Egypt, against Nehru in India. Wise Westerners would insist that stern measures be taken by the elite of Asia and Africa in order to overcome irrational forces, such as racism, superstition, etc. But if a selfish West hamstring the elite of Asia and Africa, distrusts their motives, a spirit of absolutism will rise in Asia and Africa and will provoke a spirit of counterabsolutism in the West. In case that happen, all will be lost. We shall all, Asia and Africa as well as Europe, be thrown back into an age of racial and religious wars, and the precious heritage — freedom of speech, a secular state, the autonomy of science —, which is not Western or Eastern, but human, will be snuffed out of the minds of men.

The problem is freedom from a dead past. And freedom to build a rational future. How much are we willing to risk for freedom? I say let us risk everything. Freedom begets freedom. Europe, I say to you before it is too late: Let the Africans and Asians whom you have educated in Europe have their freedom, or you will lose your own in trying to keep freedom from them.

But how can this be done? Have we any recent precedent

for such a procedure ? Is my suggestion outlandish ? Unheard of ? No. A ready answer and a vivid example are close at hand. A scant ten years ago we concluded a tragically desperate and costly war in Europe to beat back the engulfing tides of irrational fascism. During those tense and eventful days I recall hearing Winston Churchill appeal to the Americans when Britain was hard-pressed by hordes of German and Italian fascists. Churchill said :

« Give us the tools and we'll finish the job. »

Today I say to the white men of Europe :

« You have, however misguided, trained and educated an elite in Africa and Asia. You have implanted in their hearts the hunger for freedom and rationality. Now this elite of yours — your children, one might say — is hard-pressed by hunger, poverty, disease, by stagnant economic conditions, by unbalanced class structures of their societies, by oppressive and irrational tides of tribal religions. You men of Europe made an abortive beginning to solve that problem. You failed. Now, I say to you : Men of Europe, give that elite the tools and let it finish that job ! »

This conference, I feel must proceed to define the tools and the nature of finishing that job, and the strengthening of that elite.

Freedom is indivisible.

Richard WRIGHT.

*La séance est levée à 23 h. 50.*