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RECOVERING EUROPE'S SOVEREIGNTY

by

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In a world that has been transformed by two world wars in one lifetime, the greatest change of all has been the reversal in the fortunes of Europe. Less than forty years have seen Europe become the World's battlefield after she had been the World's metropolis for 250 years. In these new circumstances, Europe's hope of salvation lies in the union of her long divided peoples and provinces. There has been a sudden great increase in the scale of Man's operations, and even the largest of Europe's historic nation-states now find themselves reduced to the stature of dwarfs surrounded by giants. No Europe that is not a united Europe can hope to hold her own in the World of the future; and, if this union of Europe is to be achieved, the Europeans must achieve it for themselves; for this is something that nobody else can do for them. At the same time, this enterprise of uniting Europe is something more than a merely European concern, because the salvaging of Europe is, after all, in the interests of the World as a whole. The World in which we are living to-day has been built, in the course of past centuries, by European hands on European lines; and, though Europe may now no longer look like the keystone of the structure, a once European world would still be shaken to its foundations if Europe were to collapse.

This new need for European unity has been manifest to discerning and far-seeing minds on both sides of the Atlantic since the end of the Second World War. But, if ideas and ideals are to be translated into living realities, they must be communicated to a wider

public, and the will to achieve them must be kindled in the hearts of the plain people who have the last word in a democratic society. It was this practical consideration that moved the Council of Europe to convene the Round Table that met in Rome on the 13-16 October, 1953; and, for one of the two British participants, it is a pleasure to record the promising, though perhaps rather surprising, fact that the original suggestion for this meeting was made by the British Government.

There were twenty-one participants, all told : six rapporteurs - three of them statesmen and three of them professors - together with fifteen publicists, one from each of the countries represented on the Council of Europe. The proceedings were organised and conducted by an able and amiable Swiss chairman, Monsieur Denis de Rougemont, under the auspices of Monsieur de Menthon, the President of the European Assembly, and with the aid of the Council's highly efficient secretariat. Since Switzerland is a neutral state, our chairman could not, of course, have represented his country officially; but then each of us represented nobody but himself; and this gave the Rome Round Table a freedom and a spontaneity that do not always come so easily to a congress composed of the representatives of governments. Even the two moving spirits at the round table, Signor de Gasperi and Monsieur Robert Schuman, were speaking 'out of school' on this occasion, though each of these two statemen has been the head of his country's government and is not unlikely to occupy this responsible position again in the future.

The presence of these two former prime ministers was the making of the Rome Round Table. The rest of us were conscious that we were having the honour of working with two responsible and practical statesmen who already, since the restoration of peace, had achieved a series of unprecedented substantial successes in building Europe together for urgent purposes of industrial organization and defence. Monsieur Schuman's and Signor de Gasperi's record gave the Rome Round Table a sense of reality, and their personalities gave it the sense of cordiality that was also needed to help members drawn from different walks of life to work harmoniously together. Signor de Gasperi and Monsieur Schuman are kindred spirits in being modest, unegotistic and affable, and the easy and friendly atmosphere in which the discussions at the Round

Table were carried out was a happy reflexion of these two statesmen's rare characters.

The debate began with two questions : Is Europe to be a world of her own, apart from the rest of the Western World and from the great non-Western majority of Mankind ? And can we find a basis for European unity in the future by tracing this unity back to its historical origins ? The Round Table's answers to both these questions were in the negative.

No, Europe would be purchasing her own unity too dear if she were to buy it at the price of segregating herself from the rest of the World. It is one of the many paradoxes of Europe's history that, though she has not yet succeeded in uniting herself, she has already in some sense united the globe by calling the overseas Western countries into existence and by casting a network of European technology, commerce and culture round the whole face of the planet. In a world in which distance has been 'annihilated' and in which there is no room, any longer, for an isolated America, there is none, *a fortiori*, for an isolated Europe. Europe cannot do without the rest of the World, any more than the World can do without Europe. Yet there is one recent and crucial European experience that is not only common to all Europeans but is also peculiar to them: the experience of having suddenly lost the world-dominion that they had been enjoying for a quarter of a millennium. This reversal of fortune has overtaken the Europeans alone, in our generation, among all the peoples of the contemporary World; and it is not an experience that the Europeans can afford to accept just passively; it is a challenge to action - and to drastic action, flying in the face of deeply ingrained national habits and prejudices - if Europe does not mean to resign herself to going under.

As for the historical question, it was agreed that the unity of Western Europe - and, indeed, of the Western World as a whole - could be traced back to the Western Christian Church and to the Roman Empire. It was also agreed that (to quote the résumé of the Round Table's work) 'contemporary Europe was divided spiritually besides being mutilated politically,' and that 'the new world which Europe had created in her own image had received no spiritual message from her because Europe herself had been without any faith of

her own at the time of her greatest political and economic expansion.' Only one voice out of twenty-one challenged a general consensus that the unity which Europe now needed would be incomplete if it were to be confined to the military, political, and economic levels. Now that Europe's supremacy on the material plane has passed away, it has become her mission to promote in the modern world a regeneration of society, through a revival of faith without the forfeiture of tolerance. But there could be nothing exclusive about such a society. It would be open to all free peoples whose morality was founded on a belief in, and respect for, the sacrosanctity of the human personality; and therefore, if Europe was to recover her spiritual birthright for herself and for the rest of the free world, she could not attain this common spiritual goal by an exclusive return to her own Western Christian origins.

The modern Europe that had radiated her civilisation all over the World had not been the original Europe of Saint Benedict; it had been the latterday Europe of Pierre Beyle. It had been a society embracing agnostics as well as believers, and non-Christians as well as Christians. Round our table in the Villa Aldobrandini at Rome in October 1953 there were Eastern Orthodox Christian Europeans, Muslim Europeans and Jewish Europeans, as well as agnostic, Protestant and Catholic Europeans. It was evident that, in a spiritually regenerated Europe's house of many mansions, all these divers members of the European family would need to be made to feel themselves at home if Europe's spiritual unity was to be genuine. In fact, it could only be genuine if it was a unity-in-diversity, and this, after all, was the ideal indicated by Europe's historic genius.

A spiritual revival in Europe and in the rest of the World is an end in itself; but in Europe, at any rate, it is also incidentally an indispensable means towards achieving revolutionary changes of outlook and policy in mundane affairs that might be beyond the strength of human nature unfortified by a spiritual inspiration. It was agreed that, if Europe is to succeed in finding a new place for herself in a new world, she will have to make two tremendous readjustments of her traditional attitude. If she is to retain her historical links with non-European peoples formerly under European rule, she must shift the basis of her association with them from the old ground of inequality under constraint to the new ground of friendship

on an equal footing. And, if she is to make up for the inevitable progressive loss of the revenues that she used to draw from overseas, she can only do this by creating an economic unity at home that will give her a pooled market for mass production on the scale of the United States. The individual nation-states of Europe have already lost much of their nominal military, political and economic sovereignty in effect. By uniting, they can recover some of this lost sovereignty collectively in a way that will bring gain to Europe without menace to the rest of the World.

"The end of Europe's world-wide political supremacy is not the end of Europe's mission. Her mission to-day is of a spiritual order. But she cannot carry out this spiritual mission unless she recovers some measure of independence on the material plane. Europe's day will be over only when the people of Europe resign themselves to letting it pass away." This was the Rome Round Table's concluding declaration of faith; and it is surely one that deserves to be broadcast round the World.