THE BEGINNING OF IT ALL.

My aim in this address is to introduce to you a speech, one made 174 years ago in the House of Commons at Westminster, one of the greatest speeches ever made there, though largely forgotten I think, to-day and not often referred to in South Africa now. I can imagine no audience to whom I should rather introduce it, for in a way, the work which you do springs from the ideas which are to be found in it. You will be able to appreciate, in a way which the academic historian cannot do, the force, the revolutionary force, of these ideas. I hope, then, that you will accept what I say as an offering on my part, a way of expressing my admiration for your ideals, your very brave stand for them and the work that you do in their service.

No one, as far as I know, has ever made a full historical study of the origins of colour - prejudice. It is quite a recent phenomenon in human history. It's true that one may find paintings in Ancient Egypt which caricatured the captives they made from the negro tribes who lived to the south of them, though they seemed to think the shape of their lips more caricaturable than their colour. But, then, they made similar caricatures, as a way of expressing their sense of superiority, of the captives they made in raids on the northern shores of the Mediteranean. There is no evidence of colour prejudice among the Greeks. They looked down on all those who were not Greeks, and styled them Barbarians, but they did not differentiate between Barbarians of different colours. When St. Paul in a tremendous sentence showed how Christianity destroyed the barriers between different races or groups, "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision , Barbarian, Sythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all," he never mentioned"whites" and "blacks" for the very good reason that the distinction would have added nothing of significance to his statement. The introduction of Scythians certainly was significant, for they were regarded as the most degraded of Barbarians. But they were white, not black.

It may surprise some people in South Africa that, as is shown in the classic work by the Principal of my University, "Race Attitudes in South Africa" there was no colour prejudice among the early Dutch settlers at the Cape. Colour prejudice, as he explains, is one of the signs of a strong group consciousness. There was naturally from the start a very clear distinction between the settlers on the one hand and the native population and the slaves imported from Asia on the other, and this coincided with the colour difference. But well into the eighteenth century the Dutch settlers drew a distinction in their minds between blacks who were free and those who were unfree. The distinction then was originally one of status. In much the same way when, as a consequence of their sea voyages, Europeans began to come into more than very occasional touch with negroes, they regarded them as inferior beings because they had no developed civilizatinn and, above all, because they were defenceless, but not because they had a different colour.

In attempting to determine/---

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In attempting to determine when this particular manifestation of group-consciousness, the emphasis on colour as a mark of distinction, appeared, one might think that a study of Shakespeare's Othello would be helpful. But it raises as many problems as it solves. It has been argued that Othello was made out to be a black in order to make Desdemona's marrying him even more unnatural. Did not Othello himself hint at this.

> Haply for I am black,
> And have not those soft parts of conversation
> that chamberers have?

But it has also been pointed out that there is no trace of colour consciousness in the relations between the Venetian nobility and Othello. One has to remember that Othello is "black" in the play for the very simple reason that the plot was taken from an Italian play in which he was a Moor. I could say that in this play, Shakespeare shows something of that extraordinary ability to see - or rather to feel - both sides of a question, which we can find also in The Merchant of Venice Obviously this is an anti-Semitic play, and yet it contains one of the most moving onslaughts on racial discrimination to be found in all literature; "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs dimensions, senses, affections, passions? " But I should say that there is enough in Othello to show that some kind of colour-consciousness was at least beginning to appear. One finds this also in The Merchant of Venice. "The Prince of Morocco in this play is regarded as no unworthy suitor for the hand of Portia, and in fact, she goes so far as to say that he

> stood as fair
> As any comer I have looked on yet
> For my affection,

but his opening words to her are

> Mislike me not for my complexion,
> The shadowed livery of the burnished sun,

and when he makes his choice of the wrong casket and leaves with his attendants, she says,

> A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go
> Let all of his complexion choose me so.

It seems significant though that when Shakespeare came to depict a savage from the West Indies in The Tempest, he never referred to his colour. Perhaps even more significant was the fact that in productions of Othello the Moor of Venice was played as a negro until the early years of the eighteenth century, when it came to be felt desirable for him to be no more than brown-skinned. By that time England had certainly become colour-conscious. It really would not do for the hero of a play to be, as Iago put it "sooty".

The reason for this is not far to seek. England had become involved in the slave trade, bringing negroes from Africa to America and the West Indies.

For a good many years/---
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For a good many years she had had very little interest in this particular article of commerce, but in 1663 a new Charter for the African Company gave it a monopoly in the English traffic in slaves, the Company engaging to supply the modest total of 3,000 slaves a year. What made England the country more involved in it than any other was the Treaty at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1713, which gave her the monopoly of the supply for the Spanish colonies in America. By 1770 British ships were carrying about 50,000 slaves a year across the Atlantic; or about half the total supply. By 1800 about six sevenths of all the slaves from Africa were transported in ships coming from the port of Liverpool alone. Never before the days of the Nazis, I suppose, have so many men and women been treated with such inhumanity as were the Africans who were seized or bought to be transhipped to the Americas. It seems astonishing that ordinary men, who were not themselves concerned with the trade, were so ready to support its continuance, even when people appeared who were ready to tell them of all the horrors it involved. We can learn a good deal, I believe, from the supporters of the Slave-Trade.

Among those who were unhappy about it early in the eighteenth century was the poet, Alexander Pope. His lines in his Essay on Man were an early expression of the disquiet some Englishmen felt. (In them the word Indian refers to the West Indian negro; his native land is Africa)

LO! the poor Indian, whose untutor'd mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;
His soul, proud Science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;
Yet simple Native to his Hope has given,
Behind the cloud - topt hill, an humble heav'n ;
Some safer world in depths of woods embrac'd,
Some happier island in the watery waste,
Where slaves once more their native land behold,
No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.

The Christians did indeed thirst for gold. But it would be a great mistake to think that it was only those directly concerned, the West Indian planters or the Liverpool merchants, who for this reason supported the Slave Trade. A great many people had a more indirect interest in maintaining it, these lines by Pope were themselves based on some in one of his earliest poems, "Windsor Forest" which was written in 1713, the very year when England gained the monopoly, which was then granted by the government to the African Company. The sentiments Pope expressed did not prevent him from investing some of his money in the Company. And going beyond that, it came to be believed that the prosperity of England depended on the maintenance of this lucrative trade.

The next step was inevitable, the quietening of consciences. The Bible came in very useful, especially the Old Testament. The great Evangelical preacher, George Whitfield, wrote in 1751 "As for the lawfulness of keeping slaves, I have no doubht, since I hear of some that were bought with

Abraham's money/---

Abraham's money, and some that were born in his house, I also cannot help thinking that some of those servants mentioned by the Apostles, in their epistles, were or had been slaves. Its plain that the Gibeonites were doomed to perpetual slavery, and though liberty is a sweet thing to such as are born free, yet to those who never knew the sweets of it, slavery perhaps may not be so irksome". And then, with unexpected candour, he comes to the real point. "However this be, it is plain to a demonstration; that hot countries cannot be cultivated without negroes"

(It is only right for me to add that one of the strongest opponents of the Slave Trade was another and even greater evangelical preacher, John Wesley).

But the best ways to quieten one's conscience were first to get oneself to believe that the slaves enjoyed their treatment and were really very happy, and then that they were essentially an inferior kind of being to whom the ordinary rules governing human treatment did not apply. To believe this was made much easier by the convenient fact that they were of a different colour.

The debate that gradually developed in England may be well illustrated by considering the views of two men who were as closely connected as any two men ever have been, Samuel Johnson and his biographer, James Boswell.

"The wild and dangerous attempt which has for some time been persisted in to obtain an act of our legislature, "Boswell wrote, to abolish so very important and necessary a branch of commercial interest, must have been crushed at once, had not the insignificance of the zealots who vainly took a lead in it, made the vast body of the Planters, Merchants and others, whose immense properties are involved in that trade, reasonally enough suppose that there could be no danger.....to abolish a <u>status</u>, which in all ages God has sanctioned, and man has continued, would not only be <u>robbery</u> to an innumerable class of our fellow-subjects; but it would be extreme cruelty to the African Savages, a portion of whom it saves from massacre, or intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life, especially now when their passage to the West Indies and their treatment there is humanely regulated. To abolish that trade would be to --- Shut the gates of mercy on mankind".

One could hardly go further and after reading such hypocrisy it is almost a relief to listen to someone who felt it quite unnecessary to employ any whitewash, like the London Alerman who declared in the House of Commons in 1790, "The abolition of the (Slave) Trade would ruin the West Indies, destroy our Newfoundland fishery, which the slaves in the West Indies support by consuming that part of the fish which is fit for no other consumption, and consequently, by cutting off the great source of seamen, annihilate our marine"

Dr. Johnson, of course, is regarded as the very type of English Conservative. "But, Sir," said Sir Adam Ferguson to him once,"in the British Constitution it is surely of importance to keep up a spirit in the people, so as to preserve a balance against the crown", To which Doctor Johnson replied "Sir, I perceive you are a vile Whig". But it is a great mistake to imagine that all those who attacked this system, so firmly established by custom, so necessary, as most people thought, to preserve English prosperity-or as one might say to-day the English way of life, - to imagine that they were radicals, or as we should say to-day "liberals" or perhaps "anti - anti - Communists". For it was of

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Johnson that we are told that "upon one occasion, when in company with some very [illegible] men at Oxford, his toast was, "Here's to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies;" and who once wrote, " The laws of Jamaica afford a Negro no redress. His colour is considered a sufficient testimony against him. It is to be lamented that moral right should ever give way to political convenience".

Boswell wrote of "the insignificance of the zealots who vainly took a lead in it", that is, in the attempt "to abolish so very important and necessary a branch of commercial interest". They must have seemed very insignificant to themselves when they set out to destroy the system. When the society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed in 1787 it consisted of only thirteen men. It is interesting to consider how the two of the most famous of the thirteen came to take up the cause. Thomas Clarkson was a student at Cambridge and in 1785 he entered for a Latin Essay prize on the subject, "Is it lawful to make men slaves against their will?" Two years before a group of six Quakers had decid·d to agitate against the slave trade and, when Clarkson set about his task, they had just published a book by an American Quaker, Anthony Bezenet, on the condition of the slaves in the British Colonies. They approached the Headmasters of Winchester, Eton, Harrow, Westminster and Charterhouse to ask if they might distribute copies to the boys in their schools. I do not think that it is know what reception they had, but I like to think of two of my predecessors being embarrassed in this way. Clarkson, in search of material, obtained a copy and read it, and he made considera-able use of it in his essay. He won the prize and had the distinction of reading it publicly in the Senate House at Cambridge. Then he mounted his horse to ride home to London, and as he did so he could not help thinking about his essay. "I stopped my horse occasionally, and dismounted and walked. I frequently tried to persuade myself in these intervals that the contents of my essay could not be true.....Coming in sight of Wades Hill in Hertfordshire; I sat down disconsolate on the turf by the roadside and held my horse. Here a thought came into my mind - that if the contents of the essay were true, it was time some person should see these calamities to their end. Agitated in this manner, I reached home. "He is the only man I know of who was persuaded to change his whole course of life by something he had written himself. Before long he discovered that there were some others, though only a very few, who were as agitated as he was.

William Wilberforce came to the same conclusion very differently, but here again one can see the extraordinary influence of a handful of people. In 1787 he was twenty-eight years old and a rising Member of Parliament, which he had entered immediately he became of age. He dislied the Slave Trade, but it did not particularly distress him. And then one day he was invited to stay by a married couple, Sir Charles Middleton, a great Admiral and his wife, who a few years before had travelled home from the West Indies with a young clergyman, and he had told them something of what he had seen in the slave plantations. He was a guest there as well and the three of them pressed the young Member to raise the issue in Parliament. They were not the only influences brought to bear on him.

He also met/---
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He also met Clarkson and some others. He began to be interested and he started questioning merchants in London who traded with the West Indies. They were quite ready to talk, for as Wilberforce said"the trade" had not yet "become the subject of alarming discussion".

Now Wilberforce's great friend in the House of Commons, a young man of almost exactly the same age as himself, was the Prime Minister, William Pitt, who had reached this position at the astonishinly early age of twenty-four. Pitt, of course, knew of his friend's new interest, and, for that matter, he too was unhappy about the trade. And then, one day in 1787, as they sat together "at the root of an old tree", Pitt said to him, "Why don't you, Wilberforce, give notice of a motion on the subject of the Slave Trade?". And so the battle came to be joined. We know a great deal about the man who founded the movement for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and I must admit that I find it fascinating to be able, as one can only very rarely, to see the first minute beginnings of a movement which was to accomplish what must have then seemed almost impossible. Nowhere in History can one see more clearly what can be done by intensely strong moral convictions. The movement which led to the ending of the Slave Trade was the greatest of all instances of what can by achieved by moral protest.

Wilberforce proposed his motion, after much careful preparation, in May, 1789, in a very great speech, lasting three hours. The issue cut right across the normal lives of party division. He was supported not only by Pitt, the Tory Prime Minister, but also by the two great leaders of the party in opposition, Fox and Burke. But most of Pitt's cabinet were firmly against him on this issue and it was quite impossible for him to make it one of government policy. Preliminary successes, such as the passing of Wilberforces' original motion that the Privy Council should investigate the question of the Trade and of a Bill which limited the number of slaves a ship might carry, made those who supported the Slave Trade, realise that they must rouse themselves. In 1791 Wilberforce brought the matter to head and moved a resolution "for leave to bring in a Bill to prevent the further importation of slaves into the British islands in the West Indies". He noted the result in his diary, "Tuesday (April) 19 Resumed debate and badly beat".

He tried again next year. By that time fate seemed to be on the side of the planters. People were beginning to be afraid of the French Revolution, and all that it implied and the argument that Abolition was an attack on Property seemed a very cogent one. A slave insurrection in the French island of San Domingo in which appalling atrocities were committed on both sides made men fearful of anything which might excite the slaves on the British islands. And the leaders of Slave. s' interests in the House, of whom the most important was Pitts' greatest friend and closest colleague in the cabinet, Henry Dundas, were skilful. When on April 2nd, Wilberforce moved his resolution; "That it is the opinion of this committee (that is the House of Commons in committee) that the trade carried on by British subjects, for the purpose of obtaining slaves on the coast of Africa, ought to be abolished", they did not oppose it directly. They moved a very cunning amendment, of which I shall tell in due course.

It was a tremendous/---
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It was a tremendous debate, a battle of the giants. Wilberforce began with an excellent speech, in which he concentrated on two points, that the Slave Trade was intolerable and that its abolition would not ruin the planters. He was succeeded by two champions of the Trade, one the Member for Liverpool, who made all they could out of the rebellion in San Domingo and its resultant horrors. And then Dundas spoke. His speech was a remarkably clever one. He made no attempt to defend the Slave Trade; he was all for abolishing it. But were they being practical? And were they not in danger of forgetting the importance of defending the rights of individuals? Would it not be better to pro proceed carefully by means of regulations, which would ease the situation? They should promote breeding among the slaves - this would make new purchases from Africa less attractive; they should improve the conditions of the slaves and do something to educate their children. In this way, he believed, the trade would in the end die out. He appealed to all "gentlemen of the moderate or middle way of thinking"; he asked them "to reduce the question to its proper bounds".

He was succeded by one of the greatest debaters in the House, one of the greatest the House of Commons has ever known, Charles James Fox, a violent enemy of the Slave Trade. He let fly at Dundas for his appeal for Moderation. Was their to be moderation in robbery, murder, pillage and destruction? To him it seemed that these Regulations would prove to be a foundation to preserve the Trade, not for some years to come, but for ever. He concluded by summing up his views on the Slave Trade. "I believe it to be impolitic : I know it to be inhuman. I am certain it is unjust. I find it so inhuman and unjust that, if the colonies cannot be cultivated without it, they ought not to be cultivated at all". It was magnificent, but it may not have been wise. Many members were already frightened by what was happening in France, very near to them.

> After all this vehement speech was made by someone who had said of the taking of the Bastile "how much the greatest event in the history of the world, and how much the best".

Dundas answered him in the most effective way possible. In a few sentences he moved his amendment to the resolution. It could not have been a simpler one. It just inserted into the original resolution the word, "gradually" The Slave Trade "ought to be gradually abolished".

The next speaker was a young man, already a junior member of the government, who was one day, as Lord Liverpool, to be Prime Minister for fifteen years. He welcomed the amendment and had some ideas of his own. Slave-owners who promoted a higher birth-rate among their slaves might benefit financially; female slaves who had five children, provided they reached the age of seven, might be freed; every ship which brought from Africa more young women than men might receive a bounty, for the islande should be encouraged to produce their own slaves.

It was now after half-past five in the morning and then Pitt rose to speak.

I have an idea/---
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I have an idea that he realised that Fox's vehement outburst might have done more harm than good, and he began very cautiously. After all, he suggested, the supporters of the amendment had condemned the Slave Trade. "Mankind", he said "in general, are now likely to be delivered from the greatest practical evil that ever has afflicted the human race - from the severest and most extensive calamity recorded in the history of the world" (It was not quite what Dundas and his friends had meant, of course). He then said that they ought to consider carefully whether gradual would be more effective than immediate abolition. With all this preliminary part, I think I need not deal. His apparent determination to take his opponents seriously must have been deliberate. It made the second half of his speech all the more startling. "I beg pardon", he said, "for dwelling so long on the argument of expediency". All the arguments which were drawn from it pleaded more loudly and more strongly for an immediate, than for a gradual abolition.

"But now, Sir, I come to Africa". With these words a new chapter in History was opened. For the opponents of the Slave Trade up to that point had thought in terms of the West Indies. After all, in the year 1792, the European world know very little of Africa. There were the Portuguese colonies, but they did not then extend more than two hundred miles or so from the coast. There were some 15,000 Dutch Settlers at the Cape. There were some isolated posts and strips of territory in West Africa. The slaves of North Africa were in the control of the Berber Corsairs. Something was known of Egypt, but it was thought of as part of the Ottoman Empire. Africa then was as been said, little more than a coastline. No one then concerned himself with what happened beyond the coastline, except to be aware that some of the slaves that were purchased must come from there. Whitfield used to refer to the slaves as Ethiopians. To Pitt it was given to see further. "Long as that continent has been known to navigators" he said "the extreme line and boundaries of its coasts is all with which Europe is yet become acquainted.....As to the whole interior of that continent you are, by your own principles of commerce, as yet entirely shut out: Africa is known to you only by its skirts. Yet even there are you able to infuse a poison that spreads its contagious effects from one end to the other, which penetrates to its very centre, corrupting every part to which it reaches".

"But now, Sir, I come to Africa. That is the ground on which I rest. Why ought the Slave-Trade to be abolished? Because it is an incurable injustice. How much stronger then is the argument for immediate, than gradual abolition! " He dealt with the specious argument that it was a necessary evil. "The origin of evil is indeed a subject beyond the reach of human understandings; and the permission of it by the Supreme Being , is a subject into which it belongs not to us to enquire. But where the evil is a moral evil which a man can scrutinize, and where the moral evil has its origins with ourselves, let us imagine that we can clear our consciences by this general, not to say irreligious and impious, way of laying aside the question" But his gaze was turned by now in a prophetic vision, on the whole continent of Africa. He saw the temptation which the traders laid in the way of the African peoples to sell their fellow-creatures, leading to misery throughout all Africa. "Do you think nothing of

ruin and the miseries/---

ruin and the miseries in which so many individuals in Africa are involved in consequence of carrying off so many myriads of people? Do you think nothing of their families which are left behind? of the friendships, attachments and relationships that are burst asunder?.....What do you know of the internal state of Africa?

He turned for the moment to deal with what many felt to be one of the strongest arguments against the Abolition of the Slave Trade, that if Britain abandoned it, it would not mean that other countries would do so. "How, Sir," he exclaimed, "is this enormous evil ever to be eradicated, if every nation is thus prudentially to wait till the concurrence of all the world has been obtained?" He considered also the argument that there was "something in the disposition and and nature of the Africans themselves, "which made it impossible to civilize them. He quoted an example which had been given of African barbarism and then coldly quoted from the laws of the West Indies which established death as the penalty for any slave who ran away and left his master for more than six months."Let the house now contrast the two cases. Let them ask themselves which of the two exhibits the greater barbarity". "I hope, therefore, we shall hear no more of the moral impossibility of civilizing the Africans, nor have our understandings and consciences insulted, by being called upon to sanction the slave-trade, until other nations have set the example of abolishing it". And then, in words which were long remembered, he drove his point home. "There was a time, Sir, which it may be fit sometimes to revive in the remembrance of our country when..... .the very practice of the slave-trade once prevailed among us. Slaves.....were formerly an established article of our exports. "Great numbers"; he quoted from a contemporary historian, "were exported like cattle from the British coast and were to be seen exposed for sale in the Roman market". He listed what he called "these sources of slavery", such as debtors or prisoners taken in war, and added that "every one of these sources of slavery has been stated, and almost precisely in the same terms, to be at this hour a source of slavery in Africa". "And," he said, "these circumstances, Sir, furnish the alleged proof that Africa labours under a natural incapacity for civilization...that Providence never intended her to raise above a state of barbarism, that Providence has irrevocably doomed her to be only a nursery of slaves for us free and civilized Europeans.... Why might not some Roman senator, reasoning on the principles of some honourable gentlemen and pointing to <u>British barbarians,</u> have predicted with equal boldness, "There is a people that will never rise to civilization - there is a people destined never to be free - a people without the understanding necessary for the attainment of useful arts; depressed by the hand of nature below the level of the human species; and created to form a supply of slaves for the rest of the world".

"We, Sir, "he continued" have long since emerged from barbarism-we have almost forgotten that we were once barbarians - we are now raised to a situation which exhibits a striking contrast to every circumstance, by which a Roman might have characterized us, and b which we now characterize Africa".

He glanced at the long/---

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He glanced at the long history of his country, how"by a progression slow, and for a time almost imperceptible", it had become pre-eminent in commerce, the arts, philosophy, science and "all the blessings of civil society," in the possession of peace, of happiness and of liberty", "under the guidance of a mild and beneficent religion" "protected by impartial laws" and "living under a system of government.....which has become the admiration of the world". "From all these blessings, we must for ever have been shut out, had there been any truth in those principles which some gentlemen have not hesitated to lay down as applicable to the case of Africa".

"I trust", he said, "we shall no longer continue this commerce, to the destruction of every improvement on that wide continent, and shall not consider ourselves as conferring too great a boon, in restoring its inhabitants to the rank of human beings. I trust we shall not think ourselves too liberal" -- it is interesting to see this word of such ancient lineage, associated through many centuries with the great human qualities of freedom and generosity, now used for almost the first time in a political sense - "I trust that we shall not think ourselves too liberal, if, by abolishing the slave-trade, we give them the same common chance of civilization with other parts of the world, and that we shall now allow to Africa the opportunity, the hope, the prospect of attaining to the same blessings which we ourselves, through the favourable dispensation of Divine Providence, have been permitted, at a much more early period, to enjoy. If we listen to the voice of reason and duty, and pursue this night the line of conduct which they prescribe, some of us may live to see the reverse of that picture, from which we now turn our eyes with shame and regret. We may live to behold the natives of Africa, engaged in the calm occupations of industry, in the pursuits of a just and legitimate commerce. We may behold the beams of science and philosophy breaking in upon their land, which at some happy period in still later times may blaze with full lustre; and joining their influence to that of pure religion, may illuminate and invigorate the most distant extremities of that immense continent. Then may we hope that even Africa, though last of all the quarters of the globe, shall enjoy at length, in the evening of her days, those blessings which have descended so plentifully upon us ina much earlier period of the world. Then also will Europe, participating in her improvement and prosperity, receive an ample recompense for the tardy kindness (if kindness it can be called) of no longer hindering that continent from extricating herself out of the darkness which, in other more fortunate regions, has been so much more speedily dispelled".

The House by now was listening to him spellbound. For the last twenty minutes, Wilberforce said afterwards, he had really seemed to be inspired. The dawn had now broken over London and as he came to these words the rays of the rising sun streamed through the windows of St. Stephen's. Pitt turned towards them and with what must be the most superb use of quotation in all oratory, and obviously quite impromptu, he exclaimed,

Nos primus equis oriens afflavit anhelis,
Illic sera rubens accendit lumina vesper.

(The quotation/---
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(The quotation comes from one of the Georgics of Virgil - On us the rising sun first breathes with her panting steeds; there glowing Vesper is kindling his evening rays).

In his concluding words he showed again that it was Africa, not just "the extreme line and boundaries of its coasts", but the whole of Africa, of which he was thinking. "It is in this view, Sir, - it is an atonement for our long and cruel injustice towards Africa, that the measure proposed by my honourable friend most forcibly recommends itself to my mind. The great and happy change to be expected in the state of her inhabitants is, of all the various and important benefits of the abolition, in my estimation, incomparably the most extensive and important.

I shall vote, Sir, against the amendment; and I shall also oppose to the utmost every proposition; which in any way may tend to prevnt, or even to postpone for an hour, the total abolition of the slave-trade: ameasure which, cn all the various grounds which I have stated, we are bound by the most pressing and indispensable duty, to adopt".

But Pitt was not successful. Immediately he sat down the House divided, and the amendment was carried by 193 votes to 125. Nine months later England was at war with France and soon the problem of the Slave-Trade seemed to have been forgotten. Those who supported it began to find themselves associated with the Republicans in France. A noble lord in a debate three years later exclaimed, "And what does Abolition of the Slave Trade mean more or less in effect than Liberty and Equality? What more or less than the Rights of Man? And what is liberty and Equality and what the Rights of Man but the foolish fundamental principles of this new philosophy?.....All being equal, blacks and whites, French and English, wolves and lambs, shall.....promiscuously pig together, engendering a new species of man as the product of this new philosophy, a non-descript in the order of human beings. "But I think we can see now that, after Pitt's speech, the Slave Trade was doomed. Fifteen years later it was abolished and twenty six years after that all the slaves in the British Colonies were freed.

But it was even more important that this great speech opened up to Britain, and in due course, to all Europe, the problem of Africa. With that problem we, of European stock, are still grappling. What should strike us particularly is how at the very beginning the problem was considered, not as an economic one, or even as a political one, but as a great moral issue, a question of right and wrong. And it is because I know that I am speaking to people who look on the problem of Africa to-day, in exactly that same way that I have been so glad to be granted the opportunity this evening to recall to you this speech. You, in all you do, are echoing the ideals and the prophetic words which are to be found in it.

Professor Birley's Speech delivered at Conference 1966.