

## Irretrievable

*Kontakion for You Departed.* By Alan Paton. Cape 25s.

Alan Paton's wife Dorrie died of terminal emphysema in September 1967, after a prolonged illness. *Kontakion*, the publishers explain in a note, is a word used by the Greek Orthodox Church to mean a hymn to a saint. This book, a memorial to Dorrie, is also in part an autobiography, and offers glimpses of the author and his activities at various points in his life—as a school-teacher in Ixopo (the background to *Cry, the Beloved Country*); as principal of Diepkloof Reformatory, a school for delinquent African boys in the Transvaal; as an internationally acclaimed author; and as a moving spirit in the South African Liberal Party before its dissolution in 1968.

Paton first met his wife on the tennis-court in Ixopo in 1925. She was 28 and married (her husband died three months later), and the author describes himself then as 'virginal and shy'. He was 22. He seems to have been a rather pious young man (Anglican, though raised a Christadelphian), and he has remained a good churchman ever since. This would be nobody's business but his own, if there weren't a clear connection between his Christianity and his public life. As it is, one may well question the effectiveness of Liberal politics based on Christian charity—especially in a country where, as in Ireland, to quote Joyce, there has been 'too much God'. True, the Anglican clergy in South Africa have often spoken out against apartheid—they could do no less. But the Anglican Church is essentially an expression of WASP solidarity. Few alert, educated Africans are likely to feel at home in it; and the world is full of alert, educated Africans. They will speak in anger, while Mr Paton speaks in sorrow.

With regard to subversion, he tells the grim story of a man he calls Lester. In July 1964, members of the Liberal Party were searched and questioned; one, Lester, was detained. He broke down under questioning and informed on his associates in the African Resistance Movement, of which he was also a member. (The ARM was planning violence and sabotage to overthrow the government.) His associates received heavy sentences, while Lester's co-operation was rewarded with an exit visa forbidding him to return. Mr Paton and other Liberals were profoundly shocked, on two counts. First, because a member of the Liberal Party had conspired to use violence and sabotage; secondly because of what happened to that member and his associates. Be shocked by what happened, certainly—it's not an edifying story. But why be shocked by violence and sabotage? The South African government daily sabotages, and subjects to a form of slow violence, the lives of the majority of its citizens. Will anything short of violence bring about the desired changes in that country?

A tragic irony in *Cry, the Beloved Country* is that Arthur Jarvis, the man shot by 'native' intruders, had done more than

any other white man in Johannesburg to advance the cause of the African. Early last year Alan Paton was taken, unconscious, to a hospital in Durban. He had given a lift to two Africans on a road outside the city and been mugged. Would those Africans have behaved differently had they known that this white motorist had devoted his life, in a spirit of Christian charity, to the promotion of good will between the races? The South African Liberal Party no longer exists. Like Dorrie, and the 'halcyon days' she shared, of which Mr Paton writes so well, the spirit it espoused is irretrievable.

DEREK MAHON

## Justice Overdue

*Dowding and the Battle of Britain.* By Robert Wright. Macdonald £2 5s.

*The Battle of Britain: the Making of a Film.* By Leonard Mosley. Weidenfeld £2 5s.

Mr Wright's book is, in brief, a definitive answer to the question which has perplexed hundreds and thousands of people for nearly 30 years: how did it come about that the victorious commander in the Battle of Britain, the most crucial battle involving this country since Trafalgar, was ignominiously dismissed as soon as the battle was won? The answer is very shameful. Lord Dowding was the victim of a triumph of intrigue.

The public had no inkling of this at the time. The press had little to say about Dowding's disappearance, so that speculation was confined to gossip, and as I remember the gossip, it was to the effect that Sir Hugh Dowding had, unknown to us all, been an incompetent Commander-in-Chief who had been saved from disaster by others who were now, thank heavens, in charge. That was a reasonable explanation. The real explanation was less rational and so harder to guess.

There were some publicists, however, who to their honour insisted that the gossip might be false, and hinted that Dowding may have been wrongly treated. As early as 1941 Sir Arthur Bryant, in his column in the *Illustrated London News*, raised the question and urged that an explanation should be given. He urged in vain. When Dowding was given a peerage in 1943, the gesture had the appearance of doling out a consolation prize to a failed man, and the most distinguished living RAF commander has not yet been advanced to the rank of Marshal of the Royal Air Force.

What was it all about? Why should there have been any intrigue against Dowding when the results of his command were there for everyone to see? Those who did the intriguing, chiefly Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory, were sincerely of the opinion that Dowding's defensive strategy and tactics did not employ the RAF to anything like its potential efficiency, and that the more aggressive 'big-wing' strategy which he proposed was the real way to victory. A much larger air force could and would have used both strategies in conjunction, but Dowding had to make