

A STORY OF SORROW, AND OF FAITH

One who has read "Cry, the Beloved Country" by Alan Paton (Scribners) at once becomes a crusader; every friend must be told about this truly great book, and persuaded to read it.

The word "persuaded" is used advisedly. One might have said "urged", but the reader, fresh from the experience of living with the characters of this moving novel (which is so much more than a mere novel) will hardly be satisfied until his urgings have won for it more readers.

In this day when so many more books described as "must books" are offered us than any one person can possibly read, there is much likelihood that this book may be chosen as one to be eliminated. "Oh, a novel about South Africa? Doubtless interesting but hardly relevant to my interests. And who is this writer, Alan Paton? With so many *important* books on current affairs which one must not miss I find I do not have time, nor much zest, for reading novels."

Dear readers of the Quarterly, do not make this mistake!

This book is described as "a novel." The publishers say of it, on the flap of the jacket, that it is "the most distinguished novel that has come out of South Africa in many years, one of the most distinguished novels that has appeared anywhere in recent times." True it is a story; the author makes this clear in his "Note" which takes the place of a preface. It is beautifully written fiction. Every one of the crusading readers who persuaded me that I must read "Cry, the Beloved Country" spoke of it as "a beautiful book." One spoke of the lyrical quality of its English, but I was not prepared for the unusual beauty of its diction in which the author, most evidently familiar with the native languages of his characters, preserves the simplicity of the native idioms by literal translations. As an illustration I give you the oft repeated words of parting: "Go well"—"Stay well."

The story is for the most part told in dialogues, and one is grateful indeed to the publishers for having chosen to dispense with quotation marks, indicating conversations in the European fashion by use of dashes. This is one of the many excellencies of the mere mechanics of

the book; its make-up is an outward expression of the beauty and simplicity of the writing within its covers.

This is no mere work of fiction. The October (1948) Newsletter of the Institute of Ethnic Affairs, Inc. has as its leading article one on the Union of South Africa; and its second article is on "Africa: False Dawn or New Day." (Obtainable at 500 Otis Building, 810 18th St., N.W., Washington 6, D.C. for 20 cents.) The statistics and facts found in these brief pages (only five for both articles) contain the factual basis upon which Alan Paton has built his moving story of the agony of two fathers, a black father and a white father, whose lives are brought together by what might appear to be a blind, relentless Fate through their two sons. But neither father would call it Fate; least of the two the black father, a priest of the Anglican Church, who strikingly illustrates what John Collier, in the second of the two articles mentioned above, lists as one of the outstanding characteristics of Africans: "Their religions saturate their life: and nothing in their experience is wholly secular."

There are many counts on which this book deserves a wide reading: for its beauty as literature, for its authenticity as a social document (the "Newsletter" includes it in its list of "Suggested Reading on Africa"), for *spiritual* reading. I say this advisedly; this is a book one could read during a retreat, and cannot read without prayers and tears. There is yet another count on which I urge (and would fain persuade) our readers to read it; the hero of the book is a priest of the Anglican Church, and there is not a spurious but an authentic atmosphere of the Church's ministry, and its true Catholicity, in it.

Personally, I thank God for having had the privilege of reading "Cry, the Beloved Country." The book closes with a scene of unique beauty and poignancy, on a mountain top, at dawn.

"But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why that is a secret."

By reading this book, and getting others to read it, we may perhaps hasten that dawn; for the reader can hardly fail to absorb some of the understanding heart, and trouble of conscience, of the author. He offers no program for the solution of the social ills which engulf his characters; but there are implications in the telling of his story which no thoughtful, Christ-loving reader can miss.

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