

Paton's "Cry, the Beloved Country" wins critics nod as book of the month

► Every so often a novel appears on the book horizon which is as dazzling and as startling as the appearance of a new planet. One of the truly outstanding novels of the past few years has just made its appearance in America's bookstores. Without any fanfare and without any advance publicity, **Cry, The Beloved Country** by Alan Paton is slowly climbing to the top of best seller lists. The reason is simple. Readers have looked long and hard for a good, clean, decent, intellectually and morally honest novel. Well, they will find all this and much more in **Cry, The Beloved Country**. This is a Christian novel in the fullest sense of the word.

Cry, The Beloved Country is the story of a kindly Zulu pastor who leaves his church to go to Johannesburg in search of his only son, Absalom. For many months he has not heard from Absalom. The father fears the worst, for Johannesburg is the seat of iniquity. The discovery of gold, the oppression of the black man, the rushing economic activity has brought out the worst in many people. The parson searches long and diligently for his son. At last he finds him in prison charged with the murder of a white man who has devoted his life to improving the lot of the black man in Africa. Absalom is guilty of the murder. He is sentenced to be hanged. The story ends tragically.

And yet — and yet the novel is not a tragedy. Actually, it is the triumph of the Christian faith in the face of suffering and grief of all kinds. The Reverend Stephen Kumalo, the father, discovers that through this tragedy, which he knows comes from the hand of God, he has learned once more the mighty resource of strength and hope to be found in the Gospel.

The novel abounds in poetic passages of the highest kind. There are unforgettable characters: Msimangu, Father Vincent, Arthur Jarvis, James Jarvis, the son, Absalom. The novel is the story of contemporary South Africa and it is also the story of a mighty human experience. This is the kind of tale you read, not once, but many times. It is the kind of novel which makes you want other people to read, too. It is a landmark in modern fiction.

THE WALTHER LEAGUE MESSENGER

~ April 1948 ~

