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14/2/64

Mr Alan Paton,  
23 Lynton Road,  
KLOOF, Natal.

Paton: LIFE OF HOFMEYR

Dear Alan,

Many thanks for your replies to my queries. They have all been duly noted and incorporated into the MS.

To reply to yours of 3 February: I do not agree with you about the first five chapters being boring. C.S. Lewis wrote in his autobiography, 'I have never yet read an autobiography in which the early life was not by far the most interesting part of the story'. (This is not word-perfect.) I should not say this of your biography but to me the early life is at least as interesting as the later.

There are two reasons I can think of for this interest in early youth: first, the private man is more interesting than the public man, and there is usually more of the private man in the early part of a biography; and second, no matter what terrible or outlandish or exalted things happen in later life to the subject of a biography, in early life very much the same things happen to him as happen to the ordinary reader - birth, schooling, play, family life - and so a fellow feeling is established.

At your request I have reread chapter IV. Apart from footling changes, most of which you know about, my only comment is that I can think of no way in which it can be better written than it is.

Let us therefore leave well alone. You may feel better about the first five chapters when you see them in print. If you still want to cut out a paragraph or even a sentence here or there, this is no problem.

(2)

Now to your more specific queries, of which I am for the moment answering only those which refer to the first ten chapters:

- Ch.1, p.6: Perhaps you need something less euphemistic, like 'the sexual act'; or if not, 'sexuality' might do.
- Ch.5, p.12: I do not find the para beginning 'Hertzog's speech ....' confusing. As you suggest, I have added 'confusing' after 'what was more'.
- Ch.7, p.12: You ask if we should omit 'and how deeply Afrikaner arrogance ...' I have retained it - at least until galley proofs. It seems to me a relevant comparison to make between British and Afrikaner arrogance at this point. The 'intrusion' of the biographer quells any Afrikaner self-righteousness. My only hesitation, and probably yours, is that it may be over-prickly.

Now may I refer to a list of corrections you sent us a long time ago, on 16 September. These have been incorporated but I have the following comments:

- Ch.5, p.3, para 2: Yes, I agree to deleting 'and to ask... Verwoerd' and also the next six lines, which are not sufficiently relevant at this point.
- Ch.20,p.18: 'If history remembers... forward'. No, I have kept it in the text - a permissible look at later events.
- Ch.22,p.11: Only you can decide whether this insertion should be made. It depends on how reliable was the 'rumour'.
- Ch.24,p.5: MS has Bill not Act, and now reads Representation of Natives Bill.
- Ch.21,p.5: Surely 'one of the living Jan Hendrik Hofmeyrs' should remain? Or should I be looking somewhere else?
- Ch.31,p.18: Sorry, don't know who was Lord Mo...

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,  
  
 D.H. PHILIP  
 Editorial Manager