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# BOOKS MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE



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Alan Paton is one of those lone voices which, in a tragic situation such as has arisen in South Africa, manages to keep calm, shedding light instead of yet more darkness. It is so lamentably easy to get righteously indignant, one way or the other; to see the White Afrikaner minority as engaged in a vile struggle to protract forever their racial supremacy, or, alternatively, as striving heroically to keep alive their civilization and their religion against a mounting tide of Black savagery. Paton somehow succeeds in standing apart from these all-too-comprehensible extremes, and conveys in quiet Christian accents the true nature of the terrible conflict now dividing White and Black Africans. He used to be principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory, an exacting and often disheartening job which he executed with courage, intelligence and good humor.

His *Cry, the Beloved Country* achieved, deservedly, a worldwide fame, and will certainly be known to American readers. His latest work, *South African Tragedy* (Scribner's, \$10), deals once again with his native land and its problems, this time in terms of the biography of one of its most brilliant, though frustrated and ultimately defeated, citizens—Jan Hofmeyr.

No theme could be more suitable as a parable of present-day South Africa. Hofmeyr, a kinsman of the great Jan Smuts, seemed set for a dazzling career. As an Afrikaner himself he might reasonably expect not to attract the suspicion his compatriots felt for all English South Africans, however nationalist their professed intentions and patriotic their temper. He was a child prodigy whose intellectual brilliance carried him, first to Oxford as a Rhodes scholar, and then, at a very early age, to become principal of a South African university. Inevitably, he was drawn into politics, with the prospect of succeeding Smuts and completing his work of unification, to the end that White and Black African, Afrikaners and English might live harmoniously and prosperously together as one nation.

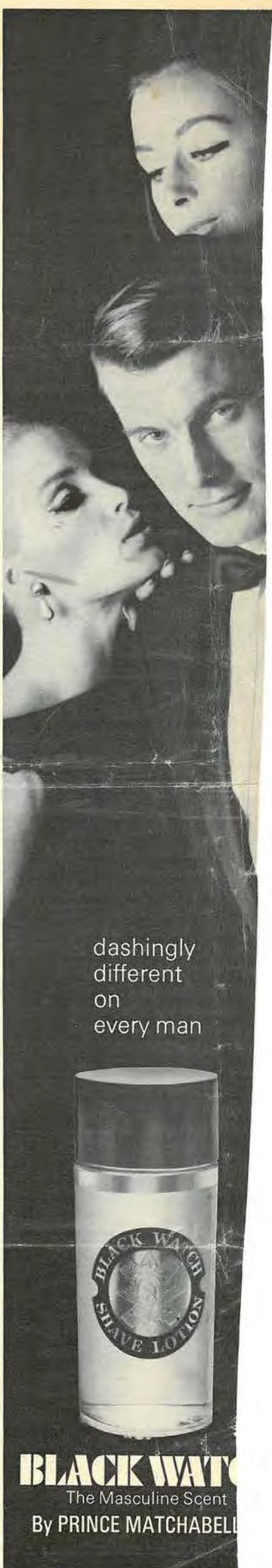
Alas, it was not to be. In the event, as Mr. Paton shows, everything went wrong. There were per-

sonal reasons, it is true; Hofmeyr remained under the domination, almost the spell, of a masterful mother, and had faults of temperament in dealing with subordinates and colleagues. The chief trouble, however, was that the liberal culture he had acquired at Oxford, the spirit of tolerance and intellectualism implanted in him there, unfitted him to cope with the circumstances which confronted him, as a politician and potential leader, in South Africa. A spirit of fanaticism was abroad. His fellow Afrikaners were narrow men whose Biblical lives in the veld cut them off from the turbulent twentieth century; who still remembered all too vividly the Boer War and the subsequent humiliations they had been forced to endure at the hands of the English; who had all the ingrained suspicion of a deeply conservative peasantry for the

financial sharks drawn to the Johannesburg gold mines and the Kimberley diamond fields. An awkward, stubborn, obscurantist, in some ways rather admirable lot. No one who has not visited them can form any conception of how remote and out of this world are Afrikaner homesteads only a few

miles away from what seem outwardly to be typical sophisticated contemporary urban areas. Olive Schreiner's account of them in *The Story of an African Farm*—incidentally, a most remarkable book—remains valid to this day. An Englishman, as I vividly remember, feels more a stranger in these parts than anywhere else in Africa.

Thus Hofmeyr, though an Afrikaner by birth, failed in the end to make himself accepted among his kith and kin. They were suspicious of his intellectual attainments, looked with sour resentment on his English associations, and with the approval of most of their austere Dutch Reformed pastors turned away from him. The future lay, as far as they were concerned, with men like Malan and Verwoerd who would lead them in the way they wanted to go—toward apartheid and total isolation in their dream of a Promised Land with themselves as God's chosen people. So it has happened. Hofmeyr and all he stood for has been cast aside, and today South Africa stands alone



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