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In the Service of South Africa

The Bookshelf

CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY, by Alan Paton. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, \$3.)

Alan Paton's is a book apart among the books of many years. It is about an unworn subject, large in human values, written by a man who has a burning zeal for his theme and the ability to convey it in a beautiful story told without false notes or an inadequate word.

The author of "Cry, the Beloved Country" belongs to South Africa. His subject is the race problem in a country where the ten million inhabitants are divided into two million whites (English and Afrikaner, that is, descended from the Boers), one million of mixed blood, and seven million Negroes. The author might be speaking for himself when he makes the wisest of his characters say: "I shall devote myself, my time, my energy, my talents, to the service of South Africa."

This novel was written while Mr. Paton was traveling in Norway, Sweden, England, and the United States on a tour of study of the penal institutions of those countries. It was while he was absent from his beloved country, while he was looking for better methods of dealing with one of her problems, that he could see the materials of his book in their right proportions. He sees fear rampant in his land—the white man's fear

of the black, the black man's fear of want. The old tribal system under which black men used to live has been broken up, the men have been drawn to the mines where they live in compounds without their families, the natives' unskilled farming has exhausted the soil, the rich hillside earth slides down into the rivers, crops fail, herds have deteriorated, the young men and girls have gone to the cities for work. In the cities, six out of 10 Negro children are without schooling, and crime flourishes.

It is not all like that. There are thoughtful white men, who would teach right methods of farming, build towns where the miners can live with their families, enlarge education. But, as one of the Negro mission preachers says: "I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when the white men have turned to loving, they will find we have turned to hating."

The exquisite, tragic, yet hopeful story that clothes the theme is about a gentle old Negro parson from the country who went to Johannesburg to find his erring son. The language, the feeling, are in complete accord with the humble, good old man, his grief at the deeds of his son, the kindness that he meets, the loving welcome he receives when he returns, bowed down with shame, to his parish. This is the story of a puzzled country, and of human beings, black and white, who are joint heirs in humanity's lot.

W. K. R.