

The First Reader

Zulu Pastor Hero of Fine Novel

South African Author Springs Surprise

By HARRY HANSEN.

Here is a remarkable story of how a fine, deeply felt novel grew out of an author's thinking about the problems of his homeland, 10,000 miles away. Alan Paton, a South African, came to the United States to study penal institutions. In Fairfax, Calif., he met a sympathetic couple, Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey Burns. He began telling them about the fear and misunderstanding that divides a handful of white rulers and millions of black men in South Africa, and suddenly he saw he could tell it in a novel, a story of how suffering united a simple Zulu preacher and an English farmer.

Mr. Paton's California friends urged him to get it written. So he wrote, in between visiting institutions here and in Canada. They got in touch with publishers. They decided the manuscript must be typed, so he sent it to them and it broke open in transit and was delayed. The chapters finally were typed and sent East separately, and there was only one afternoon before sailing time for Mr. Paton to confer with the editors at Scribners, who were getting a little winded themselves.

Such was the origin of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, or at least of the manuscript; the experience that it interprets, the deep compassion for thwarted humankind that it expresses, go far back into the social studies of Alan Paton and reflect a lifetime of thinking about problems that now ride mankind.

The fact that it deals with a strange people, with habits and words different from any we know, gives it novelty. For here described is the cauldron in which are mixed the Afrikaner, or descendants of the Boers; the Ingell, or English; the colored, of mixed bloods, and the blacks, of whom the Zulus are the largest tribe. (Scribner, \$3.)

Fear That Injures All.

Why do the householders of Johannesburg fear their native servants? Why are the blacks resentful, the Whites apprehensive and arrogant? What divides human beings, makes some of them domineering, others cringing and time-serving?

Stephen Kumalo, the simple Zulu pastor, or *umfundisi*, of St. Mark's Church in a Natal valley, pondered these matters as concrete sufferings came before him. You've met him before, the reflective, hesitant man of goodwill, asking nothing for himself. He is like Brother Noah, in *The Green Pastures*, and countless other men of God.

Kumalo is called to Johannesburg, the city where young people disappear, to rescue his sister Gertrude, who makes illicit liquor and lives in low dives. She agrees to return home with him and her little boy. He finds his brother John, a big politician, who blames the life of his people on the white

Literary Ticker Tape.

Eugene O'Neill Jr. will give two courses of lectures at the New School during the spring term. One, on Greek drama, will meet Mondays at 8:30 p. m., beginning Feb. 9; the other, on American literature, on Tuesdays at 8:30 p. m., beginning Feb. 10.

Carl van Dolen, author of *The Great Rehearsal*, vividly expressed the time lag between authorship and publishing the other day when someone commented on current interest in his new book. "After all," he said, "it has been out of my hands since last June."

Bernard DeVoto, who wrote *Across the Wide Missouri* by request, says he will finish a novel and then return to his major opus, the story of Lewis and Clark and the America in which they lived, which he has been writing for several years. This will not conflict with Lewis and Clark by John Bakeless.

Cyrus Leroy Baldridge, describing New York artist life in *Time and Chance*, says nudity becomes a bore:

"Studio life is soon found dull. A favorite model in the studios over years was an auburn-haired beauty, who, as a sideline, read proof for printers. She corrected galleys during rest periods while working for me, a drawing board on her naked thighs. Posing for artists is hard work. Muscular strength and a supple body are needed; also the ability to relax while holding a difficult position."

It is much more alluring in grand opera and novels.

man's control of gold that the natives dig, but who has compromised with white ways for his own selfish purposes.

Riches That Are Lost.

Kumalo finds a girl who has been made pregnant by his son, but he does not immediately locate his son. For the son is in jail, having confessed to the killing of a white engineer in a burglary. A lawyer agrees to take the case pro Deo—for God—but there is small chance for mercy.

Why, asks Kumalo, is there this suffering? It must be because "the tribe is broken"—and individuals are no longer responsible to the tribe. The fields are being destroyed by erosion, from too many cattle. There are not enough schools, where the young might learn not merely to read and write, but to prepare for life. "And what was evil in their desires, in their hunger? That men should walk upright in the land where they were born, and be free to use the fruits of the earth, what was there evil in it? Yet men were afraid. There is the age-old cry of the agrarian,

as a tightly organized, industrial civilization bears down upon him.

This parable of the simple-hearted Zulu parson, and the help and understanding he gets unexpectedly from Jarvis, the father of the man his son killed, ought to have a much bigger welcome than we give to new novels about tiresome homosexuals, alcoholics and lechers. But no book club has seen fit to give it the support of its great circulation.

It is not a great book, but it is a moving one, and one of the few in which human compassion is expressed simply, directly, as a human need. It is written in an idiom that must approximate the groping of the Zulus, suggesting innocence in a world of guile. The author tells his story with such narrative directness that I have to rub my eyes and say: "This can't be a novel; it makes no attempt to mystify!"

The title, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, appears in several passages and suggests that if the word "the" is omitted it would read: "Cry, beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear." We are glad Alan Paton wrote this story out of his abundant experience and love for his fellowmen. We need more such stories, for the lift that they give the spirit—books without bitterness, that combat evil with understanding, not with exhibitionism.

If the Dead Could Advise.

Just how and to what purpose the dead can communicate with the living is a subject of perennial interest to some, and it crops out once more in an entirely new form in Marya Mannes' first novel, *Message from a Stranger*. (Viking Press, \$2.75). Miss Mannes treats it as a logical experience, without any table-rapping or befuddlement, and produces a sophisticated love story.

Olivia Baird was a writer and tells her experience in the first person, seizing the reader's interest in the first sentence with: "I died on Nov. 12, 1946, in New York City after a brief illness." When Olivia died she was married to a man named Corning, but some years before she had been the wife of Max Aronson, a political thinker who bled for humanity in the abstract; and had two children by him. Her real love, however, was Brian, editor for a publishing house. The story has to do with her attempts, after death, to straighten out Brian and make him happy.

The device of letting Olivia overhear friends talking about her after her death, and of communing with Brian as he thinks about her, seems most successful in this story-telling. Of greater moment is the illumination of personality, of the intangibles that govern conduct and the emotions, seen with the objectivity that comes after death. Although the story is full of flashbacks, the author has kept the new experience and the old memory well separated and there is never any confusion. Written with exemplary clarity, it is good reading throughout.



This box was displayed in Hansen's column in the New York Evening Telegram the next day after his review of Feb. 2.

Topsy-turvydom.

A lone wayfarer in the form of a first novel passed through the Ellis Island of publishing and reached New York Monday.

It got the cold shoulder from every book club.

It was not scheduled for discussion on any radio program.

The Publishers Weekly ignored it in its forecast for buyers.

It did not get the front pages of the Sunday review sections.

Its publisher did not greet it with prepublication quotes from John Mason Brown, Herbert Bayard Swope, Dorothy Parker and Hildegard.

But on Monday the daily reviewers saluted it as the finest novel of the new year; Lewis Gannett threw his hat over Cream Hill; Orville Prescott sent off Roman candles with red, white and blue adjectives; the tooting down on West St. resembled a welcome to the Queen Mary.

And by noon the booksellers were calling up Scribners and saying: "About that order of mine for a copy of *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Make it go."