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## SOUTH AFRICAN NOVEL

*Reviews*  
**CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY.** By Alan Paton. Saunders; 278 pages, \$3.50.

Since they all face the common problems of young cultures in a western civilization increasingly dominated by commercial values, it is a pity that there is not more intellectual commerce between the Dominions of the British Commonwealth. Until last week, my knowledge of South African fiction was limited to Roy Campbell's vicious epigram "On Some South African Novelists."

You praise the firm restraint with which they write—

It's with you there, of course.

They use the snaffle and the bit all right;

But where's the bloody horse?

Whether this jibe was merited at the time, I cannot judge, but this first novel by a South African sociologist and penologist is evidence that it may now be out of date.

South Africa's racial problem is even more formidable than that of the U.S.A. Her economy is geared to an industrial machine which depends, for prosperity, upon cheap native labor. In recent years, there has been an increasingly violent sense of injustice among the Negro population, and since they outnumber the whites by over four to one, it is obvious that some solution must be found quickly.

Alan Paton does not claim to have found that solution. In "Cry, the Beloved Country," he has attempted only a dramatic presentation of the situation and the issues

arising from it. He has brought to the task those qualities which we expect of the social scientist—the clear and sober marshalling of evidence, and the strength to avoid judgments colored by personal bias.

But this novel transcends mere scientific realism through the burning intensity of the author's sympathy for his characters. The story is told from the native's point of view, and, what is more extraordinary, in the native idiom. Mr. Paton has handled this difficult and fundamentally artificial technique with unusual skill, and, to an outsider at least, there does not appear to be a false note in the whole book.

The central figure in "Cry, the Beloved Country" is an aged Zulu priest who leaves his small, upland village to search for his missing son in the urban wilderness of Johannesburg. The story is thus related to one of the oldest myths of the human race, at the same time as it is most deeply concerned with the most urgent problems of contemporary civilization. His mission ends in tragedy but not before we are made deeply aware of the crisis which faces South Africa.

Mr. Paton eschews any simple political remedy, but makes it clear that, as always, the solution must ultimately depend upon greater love, sympathy and understanding on the part of both races. Even sociologists, however, cannot tell us how that may be achieved.

NEIL M. COMPTON.