

"I find it one of the most distinguished novels of any period of my reading life" DR. DANIEL A. POLING, *Editor, The Christian Herald*

Cry, the Beloved Country...

 "a book that one knows will live for a long time."

Report by BERNARDINE KIELTY

ONCE in a decade there comes a book that one knows will live for a long time. *Cry, the Beloved Country* is such a book. It will remind older readers of *The Story of an African Farm*, because it tells a story of that faraway land. It will remind others of *The Growth of the Soil* because it tells a story of simple people on a heroic scale. It may be compared to *Grapes of Wrath* because it too is a social record of the uneven struggle of great numbers of the poor.

CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY was written under the compulsion of powerful inspiration. Alan Paton, the author, was half a world removed from his homeland, traveling from country to country, from hotel room to hotel room, while he was writing it. Parts of the book were written in Norway, Sweden, England and the United States. He started it in Trondheim and finished it in San Francisco. But external irritations never disturbed by a syllable the quiet artfulness of his story. The language has the purity of the King James version, but the rhythm is strange and new to our ears, the rhythm perhaps of the Zulu. And the tale itself, in full beauty, moves straight and powerfully towards its inevitable end.

THIS may sound like excessive praise. But the effect of this book on its readers is dynamic. The first persons to read it were two American friends of the author, to whom he gave the manuscript

when he had finished it in San Francisco. They were so impressed that they at once sat down and wrote letters to several publishers, and when the answers began coming in, telegraphed Mr. Paton—who was by now in Toronto—to mail them the manuscript, still in longhand. He was to have only a few days in New York before sailing home to South Africa, and they insisted that the publishers see the book in typed form. Mr. Paton airtailed the manuscript on a Tuesday, but owing to snowstorms no planes flew. The package went by train, broke open and had to be rewrapped. It reached an intermediate Post Office on a Sunday, three days before the author was due in New York. His friends traced the package, had the post office opened (in spite of its being Sunday) and the package delivered. They then got together a group of people who typed day and night, and managed to get the first seventeen chapters to the publisher (Scribner's) in New York by Wednesday—a few minutes before Mr. Paton himself arrived. On Thursday the next thirteen chapters arrived, and on Friday, the last seven, which he had with him, were delivered by a typing agency. There was only one afternoon left before he sailed, but that was quite time enough for the enthusiastic publisher to make his decision. It is safe to say that no one will put down the book once he starts reading it and not pick it up again and finish it. It is equally true that after reading it you will say to your friends, "This is a book you must not miss."

It is the story of an old Zulu preacher, *Umfundisi*, in his black suit green with age, and his white collar long since frayed. He lives far out in the hills, a day and a night's trainride from Johannesburg. He lives among old men and women and children who scratch at the soil and raise corn "that hardly reaches the height of a man." The young men and the girls have gone away because the eroded soil cannot keep them any longer. "The great red hills stand desolate, and the earth has torn away like flesh." When the young people leave, they go to Johannesburg, the great city, and there they fall into pitiful and often evil ways. The Reverend Kumalo's brother has gone, his sister, and—the greatest sadness to him and his wife—his son.

As the story opens a letter comes from Johannesburg that presages the disaster they have secretly feared. The old man has to take the money his wife has been saving—a few pounds for a stove for her and a new black suit for him—and go, for the first time, to the great city to find those who have been lost. His search reads like a detective story, clue following upon clue, one person covering up another, all of them fearful or sullen or ignorant. He finally finds all three: his sister, now living on the street of prostitutes; his brother a politician, an orator crying out against white domination but always stopping short of action; and his son. He has traced the steps of the boy's pitiful career to the Reformatory to which he had been committed for burglary, and from which he was but recently honorably discharged. The boy's most frightful crime follows the discharge, and occurs while the old man is still searching. This crime, and the court scene in which the boy is tried, make up one of the great episodes of fiction.

THIS is tragedy, yes, but the final effect is one of "comfort in desolation." The bonds of sympathy are strong among

these native blacks who have lost their tribal unity and are now at a loss in a white-dominated world. The friendship is warm and heartening that grows up between the Reverend Kumalo and another more experienced, more hardened minister in Johannesburg. The black men and women are deeply sympathetic with the old man in the time of his despair. But most inspiring of all is the relationship between the blacks and the white men who understand their problem. There are several such men in the story, but the one that dominates it is the elderly white man who owns a farm near the Reverend Kumalo's village. He is the father of a son who also went to Johannesburg, who studied and worked and wrote there in the cause of the native blacks, and who became one of the best



... the boy cried out to him, you must not leave me, you must not leave me. He broke out again into the terrible sobbing, and cried, No, no, you must not leave me.