

DAILY DISPATCH  
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"Cry, the Beloved  
Country"



CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY. By Alan Paton. Jonathan Cape, 9s. 6d.

A good time after this book had been hailed in America and elsewhere overseas, as a great and impressive novel about South Africa, the Jonathan Cape edition has arrived for South Africans to read. It is often not possible to rely too closely upon foreign opinion in estimates of their worth of books upon South Africa for works that might impress outside observers do not always stand up to the searchlight of local knowledge. But this book is entitled to be called a great book in any country, anywhere. It has deep truth, and simplicity and directness that come from profound understanding, and it carries a forceful message that is concealed in the writing of it and that emerges indirectly and not at the insistence of the author.

The story the book tells is apparently without special mark. It is a novel of tragedy in the Native quarter of Johannesburg, of a country Zulu parson's journey to the city to find a lost son and a lost sister, and of the desolation that overtakes him when he sees how one has drifted into crime and has gone far enough to commit murder, and the other has dropped into the easy paths of loose living. Dramatically the old parson's weary path crosses the path of the father of the murdered man.

It is the telling of the story that makes the book a moving and memorable one. In an unusual medium—an Anglicised account of the way Zulu peoples talk with each other, and regard events and current affairs—Alan Paton achieves an atmosphere of realism and effect that would probably not be secured in any other way. And the language is artistically delightful throughout. Paton's touch is delicate and sure, and his sentences are sharp and clear. There is a constant image of the events he describes.

These things can be said of many books. But rarely can they be said of books that deal with the relationship between 10 million Natives and two million whites, where the large number is a fundamentally disturbed, unsettled, leaderless mass. Alan Paton is essentially fair. He lets the world see with an incisive skill the way the tribalisation of the Native is being broken down and the way nothing is being done to replace it: nothing, that is, outside the isolated and individual efforts of men here and organisations there. If the book carries an inescapable air of futility about it and of serious warning and a great fear, it is the way Alan Paton views it, and the way a great many thinking people view it when they reduce the Native problem to the fundamentals.

Who is Alan Paton? He is a South African, born in Maritzburg 45 years ago. He was a teacher in country-Natal and for 12 years was principal of Diepkloof Reformatory, Johannesburg, an institution for delinquent African boys. So he knows with empirical knowledge what he is writing about.

Some will read this book for its revealing human drama, its exquisite expression, its powerful narrative and its quaint homeliness. Others will see in it the great social document of our most deep-seated national problem. For both categories, however, the book will have a message of sympathy and kindness towards a childlike people groping in the darkness. But the spirit of fear obtrudes remorselessly because the childlike people is possessed of the latent strength of a giant. Mainly the book concentrates on the sadness of the breaking up of a people's way of living, the sadness of the signs that are presented daily in newspaper accounts of this crime and that tragedy. Alan Paton sums up:

"Sadness and fear and hate, how they well up in the heart and mind whenever one opens the pages of these messengers of doom. Cry for the broken tribe, for the law and the custom that is gone. Aye, and cry aloud for the man who is dead, for the woman and children bereaved. Cry, the beloved country, these things are not yet at an end. The sun pours down on the earth, on the lovely land that man cannot enjoy. He knows only the fear of his heart."