

Cry, the Beloved Country - A Novel by ALAN PATON

Pc/1/1/2/51

reviewed by ESLANDA GOODE ROBESON

Some Comments on Cry, the Beloved Country

"One of the best novels of our time. In Kumalo, Paton has created an immortal figure."
—New Republic

"One novel in ten thousand. Magnificently simple, and filled with deep, compassionate understanding."
—JOHN P. MARQUAND

"A book apart from 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."
—Christian Science Monitor

"The finest novel I have ever read about the plight of black-skinned people in a white man's world."
—New York Times

"It is difficult to suggest the austere beauty both of the style and substance of this strange story."
—New York Herald Tribune

"In all my reading, I know of no more moving story than that of Kumalo's search for his son in Johannesburg. Long after I had finished Mr. Paton's beautifully written novel I kept remembering the dignity of the native preacher. And I kept thinking of Birmingham, Alabama, and of New York's Harlem."
—PHILIP FONER

"There is a vast excitement on these pages: a pursuit, a murder, a trial. But there is something else, immeasurably more important and rare: a feeling for the hurts of humble men, a longing to assuage them, a fierce yearning for justice."
—New York Post

"Here is a book which presents a clear and compassionate picture of one land and yet is universal in its basic theme. It is a book to read and enjoy and then to read again and ponder over."
—San Francisco Chronicle

This book, published by Scribners at \$3.00, will be distributed to Club members at their regular membership price of \$1.65 (plus postage and handling).

IN *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Alan Paton has written one of the truly great novels of this year, or any year. Judged purely on its literary merits, it is one of the most beautifully written and deeply moving novels I have ever read. Judged by its subject matter, it is an extraordinarily sensitive and understanding picture of the Negro and his relationship to white folk.

Are you interested in Africa? Would you like to know something about that beautiful, fascinating and terrible continent and its people? You had better be interested, because just as you already realize that you need to know something about Europe, you will soon find out that you also need to know something about Africa and Asia.

It's One World now. Europe is across the street, Africa is around the corner, and Asia is just down the road. Europeans, Africans and Asiatics are our neighbors. And for our own security and well-being, we shall have to interest and concern ourselves with the security and well-being of *all* our neighbors. When serious disorders—mental, physical, moral, or political—develop among them, we ourselves come into grave and immediate peril.

It is not easy to learn about the people of Black Africa (Africa south of the Sahara), a country ruled by colonial powers behind a wall of silence. So go with me, by way of Alan Paton's magnificent novel, and you will begin to see

the country, know the people, sense their difficulties, and struggle with them to analyze and solve their problems which are not so different from our own. You will sometimes wonder, as I did, whether you are reading about human relations, housing shortages, strikes, and delinquency and crime in South Africa, or in these United States.

On "a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills," an elderly Zulu parson named Kumalo starts out upon his first journey to the great city, Johannesburg, in search of his only son. New friends, honest generous helpful people, black and white, join him in his anxious search, which leads into heavy trouble. After days of painful waiting and pursuit, he finds his son—a frightened unrepentant murderer, imprisoned and later sentenced to die for the murder of a white man who had consecrated his life to ameliorate the sufferings of the black race.

Kumalo's life and hopes are shattered by his mounting personal tragedy, but selflessly determined to improve the hopeless condition of his tiny village and its people, he picks up the pieces and returns to Ndotsheni to face the challenge of change and of personal shame. It is humanly inspiring that life in the valley should be renewed by the efforts of the murdered white man's father, who, as Kumalo's story ends, brings in an agricultural expert to teach scientific farming to the villagers.

Cry, the Beloved Country

Cry, the Beloved Country is, Mr. Paton explains in an introductory note, "a compound of truth and fiction which, considered as a social record, is the plain and simple truth, eloquent in its simplicity, and compelling—almost overwhelming—in its sincerity, which leads to the understanding of the causes of man's suffering in the Johannesburgs of the world."

Africans coming into the city to find work must go to the black ghettos to try to find rooms. In Alexandra or Sophiatown or Orlando, one hears (familiarly):

—Have you a room you could let?

—No, I have no room.

—Have you a room you could let?

—It is let already.

—Have you a room you could let?

—Yes, I have a room that I could let, but I do not want to let it.

I have only two rooms, and there are six of us already.

—I have no place to go.

—I am sorry, but the house is too full. You must go.

So it was inevitable that Shanty Town rose up overnight. The pattern of segregation is familiar, too:

"Kumalo climbed into the carriage for non-Europeans."

"And Father Vincent treated him also with respect, and called him sir, and . . .

Mr. Carmichael shook hands with him, and called him Mr. Kumalo, which is not the custom."

It was a dreadful irony that the white man murdered by Kumalo's unhappy son should be a very real and active friend of the African people. Among his papers his father, later the benefactor of

the parson's valley, found a brilliant and searching analysis of our civilization which is too long to quote in full here and which is too important to abridge. Everyone who abhors oppression will want to study and ponder it in relation to his own criterion of social and political equality.

One of the hardest things for novelists to create—even the greatest novelists—is a convincing picture of a truly good man. Kumalo is such a man. The picture of this humble Zulu parson groping his way through the Babylon of Johannesburg in search of his erring sister and his lost son is unforgettable. It is a tribute to the author of *Cry, the Beloved Country* that he never falls into the error of blaming everything on environment, and yet never for a moment does he lose sight of the disintegrating effect of the alien white city and its inhuman pattern on the Negro folk from the back country.

And with what consummate artistry Mr. Paton tells his story, in language so simple, and words so clear we can see through to the secret places of the heart, as in a limpid stream. There are passages so moving in their stark and terrible simplicity, they remind one, in their telling, of such great Biblical stories as that of King David and his son Absalom, or the parable of the Prodigal Son. Mr. Paton writes like a true poet who is moved with compassion for suffering humanity.

Cry, the beloved country; cry, my beloved country; cry, wherever there is human want and grief, until the dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the black man's fear of bondage and the white man's bondage of fear.



Eslanda Goode Robeson, American anthropologist and author, has written articles on the Negro and Africa, and a widely-acclaimed book, *African Journey*. She is currently at work with Pearl Buck on a book titled *American Argument*, to be published early next year.