

Cape

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IN DARKEST JOHANNESBURG

CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY.

By Alan Paton. (Jonathan Cape, 9s. 6d.)

It is an English characteristic that important social reforms and advances have often been due to the work of novelists rather than of politicians. The stories of Mrs. Trollope, of Charles Reade, and pre-eminently of Dickens, not only lay bare defects in the English social framework of their day, but aroused the public conscience to demand and achieve reform, where orators, preachers, and statisticians would have failed.

Here is a novel which deals with the most pressing social problem of the Union of South Africa—the place which the native African is to play in the life of his nation, and his relationship with the white man. The distresses and abuses which it describes are as dark as any which Dickens disclosed. Its whole method of stating the problem and seeking public sympathy is wholly different from his; yet it may well achieve results of equal consequence.

Many of our readers possess some familiarity with the work the Christian communities in general, and the Anglican Communion in particular, are doing for the native in South Africa; few can be unaware to-day of the difficulties, political, racial, and denominational, which hamper and harass that work. But no sermon from a missionary priest on furlough, no documented account of the Church's needs and achievements, can bring home to the Churchman in England the battle which Christianity is fighting for the soul of Africa, as clearly as Mr. Paton has done in this work of fiction which bears on every page the stamp of factual truth.

The story is that of a native Anglican priest from a parish in the hill country of Natal. The Rev. Stephen Kumalo leaves his parish to seek for his son in Johannesburg. Drawn to the gold-fields by hopes of good wages and by dreams of prosperity, the boy has left the decaying agricultural community, still presided over by a Zulu chief, and has lost contact with his parents and family. Kumalo reaches Johannesburg, and is aided by another native priest, and finds that his son has killed a white man. The murdered man, Arthur Jarvis, was one of the most tireless workers for the native population of Johannesburg. He was also the son of the richest white farmer in Kumalo's neighbourhood. Stephen remembers Arthur as a small boy with "a brightness inside him" who rode past his church in Natal.

The tragedy comes as a blow to both fathers. Yet ultimately it issues in good. The elder Jarvis reads Arthur's unfinished essay on "The Causes of Native Crime." He comes to appreciate the greatness of his son's work and the thinking that lay behind it. He returns to assist in the reconstruction of agricultural life in his district, and to bring substantial aid to the church and parish of the man whose son killed his.

That is the barest outline of the plot. The importance lies in the thesis that it illustrates—that only, by co-operation between white and black can "the beloved country" of South Africa yield its best to man and that there can be no prosperity for the Union as long as the mutual fears of the races prevent that co-operation. What the Church is doing to quench those fears is implied clearly enough; yet it is evident also that the Church is fighting an uphill battle against racial intolerance on the one hand, and atheistic Communism on the other. This book is in no sense political propaganda, yet its political import to-day is clear. If the policy of Apartheid stands in the way of Christian work for the education of the African, and the improvement of his social conditions, then Communism, not Christianity, will become the religion of the native communities.

Read this book, and discover why Englishmen can rightly be asked to support the work of the Church in South Africa. Read this book, and be proud that the English Church is in communion with a province that can produce the types of men which are here depicted as priests and laymen, as Europeans and Africans.

C.A.S.T.O.R.