

11/6/30

BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF ALAN PATON

At present, my wife and I are living on a TB Settlement for Africans, established by the welfare organisation called Toc H. The Settlement is at Botha's Hill in Natal, and is situated in the famous Valley of a Thousand Hills. Our Warden is Don McKenzie, who gave up his own job and his security to devote his life to this work. It was in order to help him that we came here for a year.

My wife works in the office, and I am responsible for the gardens, and for the occupation of patients. These come to us after long periods of hospital treatment, so that they can be prepared for their re-entry into the world.

I am not doing any imaginative writing while I am here. I think I have proved to my satisfaction that I cannot do that kind of writing while I am working. However, I do quite a lot of other writing, in the way of articles and reports on South Africa. My intention is to finish my year here before starting to write another book.

The new Liberal Party of South Africa is also taking a lot of my spare time. This is the first non-Communist Party to have no colour-bar in membership, and the first to work for an extension of the franchise to all qualified persons, irrespective of their race, colour, or creed. It challenges the separation policies of the Government, and believes in one society common to all.

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Will this new Party be able to affect events? Will it be able to help avert a racial conflict in South Africa? The answer is that we don't know, so we are trying it out. This is the only answer that can be given.

Can one write and do all this as well? Certainly not simultaneously. If one feels a sense of duty toward's one's country, one cannot withdraw to the ivory tower. It seems that one will have to adopt a plan of alternating participation and withdrawal. It may not be an ideal plan, and one may wish it were otherwise, but it is the best that can be done. The problem is not unique; it has to be faced by millions of people.

I am therefore not a single-minded writer, in the sense that I care only about writing. But when I write a story, I am single-minded enough. Then I hardly think of anything else. I eat and sleep badly, and new ideas and possibilities waken me. Yet I am not exhausted. The work of creative and imaginative writing seems to be performed by means of energy not available for ordinary tasks.

In the meantime I am helping to do a good job at the TB Settlement, and in my free time to do my share for the Liberal Party. But when the urge comes to write another story, I hope to give to it my whole heart and mind. The pleasure of doing this is intense.