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JONTY DRIVER

## Alan Paton's Hofmeyr\*

Paton, though he does not scorn historical accuracy or an historian's objectivity, has written what is essentially a novelist's biography. Because he shares with Hofmeyr a slow and sometimes painful growth out of 'white-South-Africanness' into what Smuts called 'racial indifference', he is able to make Hofmeyr's point of view his own. For long sections of the biography, one feels almost that one is inside Hofmeyr's own mind, undergoing his experiences—only occasionally does Paton sit back from his subject, and look at his progress from an objective point of view. When he does so, it is not as a godlike Thackeray, but as a man recreating a character, anxious not so much to explain his relation to his age and events, or his influence, as to explain why he was what he was, or why he felt and acted as he did.

What was Hofmeyr? First, he was a genius. He matriculated, first in his school, third in the Cape Colony, when he was twelve; a B.A. in Languages at fifteen; awarded a Rhodes Scholarship at fifteen; a B.A. in the Sciences at sixteen; an M.A. in the Classics at seventeen; a biography of his uncle, 'Onze Jan' Hofmeyr, at eighteen; Balliol and a double first in Greats in three years; professor of Classics at the South African School of Mines (later the University of the Witwatersrand) at twenty-two; professor of Greek at the University of Cape Town at twenty-four; Principal of the University College of the Witwatersrand at twenty-four; Administrator of the Transvaal at twenty-nine; and so on until he was Deputy Premier of the Union, second only to Smuts.

But he was not a creative genius. He had a 'prodigious ability to make order of any material presented to him, to comprehend it, to analyse it, and to put it together again, to remember both it and his own conclusions for future use . . . his powers of memory were so great as to constitute a quality of his genius worthy of independent mention . . . he was an administrator of superlative ability. He knew every part of his machine . . . and when he was a Minister, was sometimes in charge of five portfolios besides his own.'

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\* *Hofmeyr*, by Alan Paton. London, Oxford University Press, 1965, 58s.

He was a great orator as well. The foundations were laid at university in South Africa, and in the Students' Christian Association, then in the Oxford Union, and finally while he was Principal of the University College of the Witwatersrand; they were to make him one of the finest Parliamentary orators that South Africa has had.

But for poetry, literature, music, any of the arts, he had almost no feeling; Paton says that his mark in poetry was Newbolt:

'Play up, play up, and play the game.'

And it was perhaps this that typified his greatest failing, particularly as a younger man—his inability to understand human frailty, and, since it is almost always part of the same failing, his inability to form close human attachments. The reasons occupy much of Paton's attention in the biography, and it is unfair to Hofmeyr to try to summarise what Paton says so sympathetically. But without some understanding of them, it is neither possible to understand Hofmeyr nor to understand the primary qualities of Paton's biography of him.

Hofmeyr was, all his life, a 'mother's boy'. His father had been married before, and had four daughters; his second wife, J. H. Hofmeyr's mother, was 'imperious and indomitable', and the four stepdaughters disliked her. Her first son, A. B. Hofmeyr, 'did not unlock the doors of her heart'. More than five years later, in 1894, J. H. Hofmeyr was born—a child of 'a quiet and gentle nature, . . . from his early years docile and obedient, and strongly attached to his mother'. He was gravely ill when he was two; she nursed him to recovery, and from then on, until J. H. Hofmeyr's death, the two were inseparable—particularly as his father died when he was only three.

Paton deals with the relationship early in the biography, and, although he returns to it again and again, his first account is worth quoting at length:

Boys have been known to wean themselves from possessive mothers, but men seldom. For a moment young Hofmeyr was able to thrust his head out of the symbiotic shell, and see what was happening there within, to himself and his mother. He was able to realise that, although years of absence and hard work lay ahead, they were not her deepest reasons . . . He was able to realise that if ever he wanted to be free, it would create such a crisis of recriminations, claims, self-pityings, and other ugliness, that he could not have borne it. So he came to heel . . .

Mother-possession delays the sexual development of a boy, and in young Hofmeyr's case this was true. At no time in his later life was the attraction of a woman strong enough to make him defy his mother, or take the step that would involve them both in ugliness and pain. If he had spent time away from her, it might have happened. While he lived with her, any relationship with a woman was impossible.

Some suggested that he was a practising homosexual, and his interest in boys and boys' camps which lasted throughout his life, was adduced as proof. To anyone who knew him, the suggestion was absurd.

Something quite different was true, namely that he was sexually normal but pretended to be asexual, and joked about his bachelordom because he could hardly have joked about his mother's possessiveness. All through his life he was attracted by women, and made infinitesimal sallies towards them; all through his life his mother knew when such a sally was being made. She was instantly aware of the slightest deviation from the pattern, and he knew at once that she knew.

Was his sexual temperature, so to speak, low? It was, I think, but not inherently. It was low because of the symbiotic shell in which he lived, and if he could have broken out of it, his temperature would have risen to normal. Why did he never break out of it? Was it too comfortable? Or was he merely used to it? Or was he unwilling to face the emotional upheaval that he would cause by breaking out of it? One thing is certain; he never, in the language of the Bible, knew a woman, and one could hazard the guess that he never, except in the most decorous fashion, kissed one either. Another thing is certain, that, aided no doubt by the lowness of the temperature, he lived a chaste and disciplined life.

Much later in Hofmeyr's life, during the election in 1948, the Nationalists used his sex-life, or lack of it, in one of their many attempts to smear him. One story was 'that Hofmeyr had got into trouble at a boys' camp, and that only the intervention of Smuts had saved him from public exposure'. And it is typical of white South Africa that another story was circulating, at the same time, that he 'had an African mistress and that was why he resisted all attempts to ensure that marriage, adultery and prostitution were made segregated activities' (referring to Hofmeyr's ministerial blocking of a Bill to prevent 'mixed' marriages).

But, even if those ghosts are laid, Hofmeyr's lack of emotional temper was to lead to the one near-failure of his career, namely, his period as Principal of the University College of the Witwatersrand. His appointment as a man of twenty-four was daring; but his conduct was not that of a man of twenty-four. At first he was brilliant; he earned the esteem of his Council; he set the University College on its feet financially; he started building programmes; he appointed some brilliant members of staff. But he did not succeed with either his staff or his students. The students, many of whom had been in the army during the First World War, reacted badly to his code of discipline; they disliked Mrs. Hofmeyr intensely. The staff, too, reacted badly to both Hofmeyr and his mother; part of the reason was that his appointment had affronted some of the older members of staff; part was his arrogance and narrowness.

All these things would have overcome—if he had been given time. But Hofmeyr, in his handling of 'the Stibbe affair', made his staff hate him—and the tension this affair caused was to continue within liberal circles in South Africa until his death.

Briefly, 'the Stibbe affair' was this. Professor Stibbe, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, during his wife's absence from Johannesburg,

had been frequently in the company of one of his typists. Hofmeyr called Stibbe to him, talked to him, and later informed him that 'the appearance of evil must cease; and if it did not, steps might have to be taken against him'. Stibbe said it was not the job of a Principal to interfere in his private life. Hofmeyr then persuaded his Council to dismiss Stibbe. A few days later the Council changed its decision, to some extent; Stibbe was now offered the chance to resign, which he, most unhappily, did.

In this review, one cannot follow the full course of the battle which developed when the circumstances became known. It is enough to say that the Minister of Education was drawn in, that Hofmeyr lost permanently the affection and loyalty of men and women like Hoernle and Margaret Ballinger (later two of South Africa's best-known liberals), and that Hofmeyr went through a period of great personal suffering—for he believed that his conduct was completely correct, and that his Senate was being disloyal and misunderstood what he had done.

The Senate/Council squabble dragged on throughout Hofmeyr's time as Principal—for it was not so much an administrative and constitutional problem, as a personal conflict—and would probably have never resolved itself unless Hofmeyr had accepted General Smuts' offer to him to become Administrator of the Transvaal in 1924. That post, at the age of twenty-nine, was important enough for Hofmeyr to leave the University, not as a failure, but as a man leaving the academic world for the greater glory of the political one. In politics, Hofmeyr's human failings did not matter as much; and age and the compromise that is an essential part of a politician's life made him a more humane man.

The third main strand of Hofmeyr's character was his Christianity—and, once again, Paton is able to deal with Hofmeyr's beliefs most sympathetically, for Paton is a devout Christian. Hofmeyr was born and baptised a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, later worshipped as a Baptist, and later still as a Presbyterian. Clergymen from all three denominations officiated at his funeral.

Paton says, wryly, that Hofmeyr would probably have resigned from the Cabinet more quickly if it supported the idea of a state lottery than if it supported some removal of rights from non-Whites. Nevertheless, it was Christian principle that led Hofmeyr along the tortuous path from racialism to liberalism—tortuous, because he was a politician dependent on white voters for his power, because he was not naturally libertarian, and because he was, by birth, an Afrikaner South African.

As a young man, his politics were predictably South African. His university experience, in South Africa and at Oxford, did little to change them. In a debate in 1913, he said,

There are in general two broad Native policies possible . . . The first is the policy of segregation, the policy of repression . . . The other is the enlightened policy . . . inspired not by prejudice but by political wisdom [. . . later in his speech] the day may yet come when inspired by the sense of unjust wrongs they may sweep the Whites of South Africa into the sea . . .

*Isis* reported on one of his speeches in the Union that he was 'very good, though unsympathetic to the "natives" to a curious extent'.

But, as Paton points out, Hofmeyr's Christian experience, in the South African Student Christian Association and in the Balliol Boys' Club (for which he had a lifelong affection), was leading him to a belief in fellowship, that transcended class and colour, and, even, religious belief itself. By the time he was Principal of the University College of the Witwatersrand, he was saying that a university 'should know no distinctions of class, wealth, race or creed' and that the biggest South African problem was 'the Native problem . . . the eternal problem of the reconciliation of justice and apparent expediency'.

By 1930, at a 'multi-racial' Student Christian Conference at the then 'Native College' at Fort Hare, Hofmeyr was moving away from the idea of 'segregation by choice' to an understanding of the nature of 'segregation by habit'—for white South Africa has never learnt the difference. Later that year Hofmeyr, in his contribution to *Coming of Age* (an anthology of liberal essays) was rejecting the phrase, 'the native problem', and was moving towards the idea of 'the Common Society'.

In 1935 he was writing, to his friend of Balliol days, Underhill, that,

he was not against separate political development as a matter of principle, but that the time for it had passed by . . . and, referring to the Representation of Natives Bill and others then before Parliament, which proposed to change the old system of Cape non-racial, qualified franchise, for a system of communal representation . . . if African opinion opposed the Bills, he would oppose also . . .\*

In fact, Hofmeyr was one of eleven M.P.s who voted against the Representation of Natives Bill, since, as he said in the House, its

brutal feature is to give to the Natives an inferior, a qualified citizenship . . . I am not one of those who would necessarily stand or fall by the ideal of common citizenship as an absolute thing . . . If we were starting with a clean sheet, it would certainly be possible to devise a system of separate representation in separate assemblies which would be fair and just and sound . . . But we are not starting with a clean sheet . . . once franchise rights have been given and exercised by a

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\* Paton does not quote the exact text of the letter.

section of the community, then no nation save at the cost of honour and ultimate security should take away those rights . . . Some have sought to find that justification in terms of high ethical and political principle. Some have used those blessed words and phrases, segregation, trusteeship, the Native developing along his own lines. The Native developing along his own lines—that means for most who use the words the same as the Native being kept in his place.

Objecting to the concept of communal representation, he said,

Communal representation of different races implies a divergence of interests, and in South Africa there is no real ultimate divergence of interests between Europeans and non-Europeans . . . This Bill says that even the most educated Native shall never have political equality with even the least educated and the least cultured White or Coloured man

and he finished his speech with a noble affirmation of humane principle and the future of his country.

This speech made Hofmeyr the darling of South African liberals, and of the non-white people. But it made him the curse of the bulk of white South Africa—from then (Paton quotes Blackwell's *African Occasions*) began 'the steady, insistent and ever-growing opposition to Hofmeyr within the ranks of the United Party, mainly from the Platteland'.

Later, in 1936, in an address to societies at two universities, he wrote down some more of his political thought. This address, which rejected white domination, black domination, *and* equality, crude segregationism, constructive (Smutsian) segregationism, also put forward his ideas of development by economic advancement, and by encouraging 'Native development in Native areas, even though this is only of partial applicability'. Paton comments that Hofmeyr had;

the characteristics of many white South Africans. He wanted justice and economic equality, but not social equality or race mixture . . .

Paton says that no non-White ever entered the Hofmeyr home except as a special visitor, nor did any non-white person ever call the adult Hofmeyr by his first name.

Hofmeyr's life was not the life of an angel or a paragon, but of a white South African painfully inclining his way towards emancipation, with fear and caution, but not without courage.

Later that year, after an official visit to India, Hofmeyr showed his courage in his attacks on the anti-semitism raging through South Africa, and, at the start of 1937, at Fort Hare again, he said,

I see no solution of what I refuse to call the Native problem, what I shall call the problem of race relations, save on the basis of the recognition that white man and black man are possessors of a common humanity,

and went on to talk of 'racial indifference', which Smuts preached so often abroad, so seldom at home, and practised almost not at all.

But Hofmeyr was not consistent. He did not recognise the evil in the Native Laws Amendment Bill,\* which put further controls on the movement of Africans from country to town, and their residence in town. Instead he supported all save one clause, which gave local authorities powers to refuse entry to or order expulsion from the towns. This, said Hofmeyr, implied that Africans did not share a common humanity with Whites.

But, even granting the inconsistency, granting that by today's standards Hofmeyr was a white reactionary, it is essential to see that, in his day, what he was saying was, if not revolutionary, at least very much left of centre. Indeed, in 1937 *Die Waarheid* called him a Communist—that useful term of abuse, still so popular in South Africa.

Why, then, did Hofmeyr remain in the United Party, and not break away to form a Liberal Party, as so many South Africans urged him to do? The answer lies partly in his complex relationship with Smuts, partly in his belief that it was best to work from within the United Party.

Smuts, who was a distant cousin, gave Hofmeyr his first political post, used Hofmeyr as a brilliant workhorse, left vast burdens on Hofmeyr as Deputy Prime Minister while Smuts went on his international travels, seldom gave Hofmeyr the praise that was his due (which Hofmeyr felt deeply), and was, in the end, blamed by Hofmeyr's mother as having caused her son's death, by overworking him. Yet, for all this, Hofmeyr was content to work for Smuts, was loyal to him, and, apparently, did not try to assume his mantle.

After Hofmeyr resigned from the Cabinet in 1938, because Hertzog appointed a man patently incapable of representing Africans as a Native Representative, there were many who expected him to found a Liberal Party. He called himself a liberal at that time and one of the first things he did after his resignation was to write an article called 'My Conception of Liberalism'. The rumours that Hofmeyr would start a Liberal Party started as early as 1936; but he always denied them, saying that 'the place of a liberal was in the United Party'.

But Hofmeyr was still in trouble with the United Party, this time over an Asiatics Bill; Hofmeyr and Blackwell fought it, Hertzog forced the caucus to censure them, and they resigned from the caucus—but stayed on as independent United Party members. In

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\* The Bantu Laws Amendment Act of 1964 is simply an extension of the same evil.

June 1939, he wrote to a friend that 'It looks as if in time I shall have to start a party of my own'.

Perhaps he would have done so, had not South Africa plunged into war in September 1939. For Hofmeyr, there was no doubt that South Africa must fight—not simply, his argument ran, because she was anti-Nazi, but because she was a member of the Commonwealth and, most of all, because the world had to face the choice between democracy and authoritarianism.

One cannot, in this review, follow Hofmeyr's career during the war. Race relations were not important in those years, although Hofmeyr continued to oppose legislation threatening the rights of non-Whites. He became Smuts's Minister of Finance, and worked prodigiously—he was Minister of Education as well, and at intervals did other Ministers' work. Of all the honours Hofmeyr received, there could have been few that pleased him more than the grant by Oxford University of the honorary degree of Doctor of Common Laws in recognition of his services during the war.

It has sometimes been said that but for Hofmeyr's liberalism Smuts and the United Party would not have lost the 1948 election to the Nationalists. Certainly the Nationalists used it often enough (though during the campaign Hofmeyr had said 'I am supposed to be in favour of equality between Europeans and non-Europeans. That, of course, is nonsense . . .') But Hofmeyr alone could not have lost an election; the truth is that he was no longer very important to the political future of South Africa. Passive resistance had started; the Natives Representative Council was accusing the Government of continuing 'a policy of Fascism which is the antithesis and negation of the letter and spirit of the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations Charter', and was, in effect, about to disband itself in protest against its own ineffectualness; Smuts was writing from abroad that 'there is a growing widespread [international] opinion adverse to us'. On the other side, Malan and his men were travelling the Platteland, talking of *die volk* and *die swart gevaar*, and saying that Hofmeyr was going to abolish the colour bar. The United Party itself was doubtful about Hofmeyr—and Hofmeyr was in doubt about the United Party; he wrote to a friend in July 1947:

It would be difficult for me, if Smuts were to fall away, to lead the United Party, without either doing violence to my convictions or taking a line which would split the Party.

In March 1948, he wrote in his diary that 'the party seems to accept me almost unquestioningly as the next leader', and he implies that he would accept the Prime Ministership.

For Smuts' defeat was terrible, but Hofmeyr seemed at first not to realise just how serious the lost election was; he wrote:

My own feeling is one of relief—it will be good to be able to take things more easily for a while. I think too that it will tend to make my political position easier, though it will be difficult in the first instance.

Hofmeyr, however, was right; for a time his position was difficult, since factions in the United Party wanted to use him as a scapegoat for the Party's failure, but by the time of the United Party Congress in November, he himself saw that he was still the darling of the Party; in the end he would probably have been its leader.

But all this stopped mattering; Hofmeyr had a heart attack in late November 1948 and, on 3 December, he died. Hofmeyr's mother blamed Smuts; but whatever Smuts did to Hofmeyr, he said, shortly after Hofmeyr's death, 'Now that Hofmeyr is dead, South Africa will not have a conscience. I felt his death more keenly than that of my son.' Paton stops his story here; but it is worthwhile tracing South African history a little further.

At the next General Election, the United Party, under the leadership of Strauss, lost more seats. Strauss was ousted, and Graaf brought in, mainly because he was thought to have a following in the Platteland. Despite the move to the right—some United Party spokesmen even tried to attract votes by talking of the *swart geewar* (black peril)—the U.P. lost even more seats at the next election. Then most of the 'liberals' in the U.P. broke away to form the Progressive Party—basically the Party of the richer urban communities.

One may speculate whether Hofmeyr, if he had survived to lead the United Party, could have held it together after Smuts went. Whatever the answer, the truth seems to be that Hofmeyr's death made almost no difference to the course of South African history. Even if Hofmeyr were alive and active today, the Nationalists would still be very much in power, the old Smuts United Party would be split in two, the right wing having more M.P.s than the left, and, at his best, Hofmeyr would be a glorified Helen Suzman or, extra-parliamentarily, a J. Hamilton Russell. If he were in Parliament, he would face the traditional difficulties of liberal M.P.s—how does one reconcile one's views with the fact that one is elected by Whites, whose liberalism is usually controlled by self-interest?

If one asks how Hofmeyr would have reacted to the present situation in South Africa, one sees even more clearly how little effect he could have. Indeed, no one man, however great, could solve the problems which South Africa now faces. It is as though the country were in the grip of some irrational fate, which has as much to do with the exposed entrails of slaughtered birds as with human reason.

Inside South Africa, there are, on the one hand, a Nationalist Government which grows stronger each month, an official Opposition, whose policy changes so quickly from right to centre to right again that it is scorned, by left, centre and right, as no policy at all,

a minute and precarious Progressive Party—and a Liberal Party that has suffered badly, from bannings, defections, and youthful excesses.\* On the other hand, the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress, both banned, both suffering from lost leadership, both seeming sometimes to be concerned more with international jockeying than national action, seem very inactive, although both claim that they still have extensive organisation within South Africa. The African people, who suffer more and more politically, gain, at any rate in the towns, more and more economically, seethe with discontent but are forced into passivity by police vigilance, economic dependence, and tribalism.

Outside the country, one hears talk of sanctions, of United Nations action, of intervention by the Organisation of African Unity—but are any of these likely? Sanctions, it is argued, are feasible; but will the U.N. be in any condition to implement these, in any foreseeable future? The O.A.U. is having many problems coping with instability in the Congo; could it cope with stability in South Africa?

Thus, most liberal or radical South Africans tend, these days, to turn to violence. How often does one hear, 'Of course, the solution to the problem is bound to be violent'? But how often does the speaker go on to say what sort of violence, when, how, by whom, to what effect, to what purpose? Almost never—because once one has said that violence is the only answer, one need do nothing except sit back and wait for violence.

There are two sorts of violence practised in South Africa; the first, called strategic sabotage, has failed. The two organisations which practised it, 'Umkonto we Sizwe', and the African Resistance Movement (or the National Committee of Liberation) have been virtually smashed this last year—the latter apparently for good. What have they achieved? Some publicity, minimal damage, and a drain on leadership, white and black.

The second sort, terrorism, real violence, has, thus far, been glorified murder—Paarl, Bashee Bridge, perhaps one or two other places. The effects have been small, retribution swift and terrible, and purpose obscure; although the causes are real enough. One can do no more than think of Orwell's attacking Auden for writing of 'necessary murder' in his poem, 'Spain', by asking if Auden had ever seen a murdered man.

Though sabotage has failed, and terrorism has been ineffective, one may be fairly sure that violence will continue; for those who argue that violence will not happen in South Africa are simply shielding their eyes to the fact that violence has already happened. Will the violence take the form of guerilla warfare? If it does, surely it will be snuffed out as quickly as terrorism and sabotage were? Will it take

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\* Though the fact that some of the young Whites who were recently involved in sabotage were also members of the Liberal Party has absolutely nothing to do with the policy of the Liberal Party itself, which is committed to non-violence.

the form of an African army of invasion? Very unlikely, in the foreseeable future.

Again and again, one comes back to that 'foreseeable future'. There is no change for the better likely in South Africa 'in the foreseeable future'.

Can one, then, say anything about change in South Africa at all?

To this reviewer, there seem to be certain general statements that need to be made, though they cannot here be argued in detail.

(1) Change in South Africa will depend on the people within South Africa, not on any international pressure or action. Even sanctions will be useless unless there is a climate of change in the country. To argue that sanctions will produce the necessary climate of change seems to put carts before horses, for surely sanctions are simply going to cause white belts to be tightened, unless there are signs that the belts are ready to break or to be taken off beforehand?

(2) Too much hope is being placed in a favourable decision by the International Court over the South West Africa mandate. Even if the Court upholds the case brought by Ethiopia and Liberia, a court decision and effective international action are not necessarily connected.

(3) Opposition in South Africa is not dead, even if it is inactive.

(4) The non-Afrikaans universities have still not capitulated to the *apartheid* philosophy, though they have been forced to bow down materially. There is still a National Union of South African Students,\* capable of passing a resolution on Pan-Africanism which reads, in part, that the Union accepts that

Pan-Africanism has, at its heart, the concept of loyalty to the African continent, which implies political and economic control of the resources of Africa by the people of the African continent, on the basis of self-determination and democracy, and has as its ideal political, economic and social co-operation among all the people and territories of Africa . . .

and defines as an African 'any person who owes his allegiance not only to his own country in Africa, but to Africa as a whole'.

This may not sound revolutionary; but if one realises that the membership of the 18,000-strong Union is about 90 per cent white,† one begins to see some hope for some white South Africans still.

(5) The economic progress of South Africa is leading to greater flexibility socially and educationally; a limited flexibility, granted, because it is in direct opposition to political inflexibility, but still containing the possibility of change.

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\* Of which Hofmeyr was Honorary President from 1933-48, although Paton does not mention this.

† For the obvious reason that about 95 per cent of the university students in South Africa are white.

(6) Whatever change comes about, it will be neither simple nor caused by some single action.

(7) Change must eventually come, just as change is eventually coming in Spain, and as change came, and will come, in Latin America and in Africa.

This last statement may seem ridiculously obvious. But one thing that the present generation of South African radicals can learn from Hofmeyr is that hope is a better political agent than despair. If this reviewer were given a chance to choose the contribution he would happily make to the general anti-*apartheid* movement, he would, without hesitating, choose to contribute a song as convinced of ultimate victory as the U.S. Civil Rights song, 'We shall overcome'. There used to be a whole set of South African freedom-songs; no one sings them any more. Despair is freedom's worst enemy.

This brief outline of time present in South Africa illustrates why Paton has chosen to write of Hofmeyr more as a man than as a political figure, more as a human being than a historical character. The reason lies partly in Paton's talents—he is a novelist rather than a historian. But it lies more in the fact that Hofmeyr is not really important as a directing force in South African history. The seeds of the present situation have been sown over three hundred years; Hofmeyr's political career was brilliant, but it was also ineffective, because it opposed what no one man could oppose. What we learn from this biography is not political; it is essentially human.

For that matter, can white liberal South Africans ultimately hope to be of any real political importance? They can continue to speak out against oppression and for human values; they can be active enough to be an embarrassment to the Nationalists; but basically the role which men like Paton, and, one hopes, the sort of people at present in the National Union of Students in South Africa can play, is more spiritual than political. By standing out against pessimism about the ultimate victory of humane values and by working, even in the present gloom, towards 'racial indifference', liberal South Africans may be able to contribute more than history will allow them to contribute politically.

One of the best things about the biography is that it is written by one white liberal South African of another. The truth is that it could only have been written thus. One of the beauties of the book is the dust-cover; on the front, bespectacled, round, almost bland, definitely ugly, is Hofmeyr's face—with 'Hofmeyr' emblazoned above and 'Alan Paton' below. On the back, bespectacled, round, almost surly, definitely ugly, is Paton's face—and below is emblazoned 'Alan Paton'. It is not so much that Paton obtrudes his own personality into his book; it is almost as though he were writing a defence of Hofmeyr, of himself, of all who have come out of white privilege to some sort of position of non-racialism.