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Cry, the Beloved Country

A NOVEL BY

ALAN PATON

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Cry, the
Beloved Country


BY

ALAN PATON

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CRY, THE
BELOVED COUNTRY

TO
Aubrey & Marigold Burns
of
Fairfax, California

AUTHOR'S NOTE

IT IS TRUE that there is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. It is true that it runs to Carisbrooke, and that from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest scenes of Africa, the valley of the Umzimkulu. But there is no Ndotsheni there, and no farm called High Place. No person in this book is intended to be an actual person, except two, the late Professor Hoernle and Sir Ernest Oppenheimer; but nothing that is said about these two could be considered offensive. Professor Hoernle was Professor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, and a great and courageous fighter for justice; in fact he was the prince of Kafferboetics. Sir Ernest Oppenheimer is the head of a very important mining group, a man of great influence, and able to do as much as any one man to arrest the process of deterioration described in this book. That does not mean of course that he can do everything.

Various persons are mentioned, not by name, but as the holders of this or that position. In no case is reference intended to any actual holder of any of these positions. Nor in any related event is reference intended to any actual event; except that the accounts of the boycott of the buses, the erection of Shanty Town, the finding of gold at Odendaalsrust, and the miners' strike, are a compound of truth and fiction. In these respects therefore the story is not true, but considered as a social record it is the plain and simple truth.

The book was begun in Trondheim and finished in San Francisco. It was written in Norway, Sweden, England and the United States, for the most part in hotel-rooms, during a tour of study of the penal and correctional institutions of

these countries. In San Francisco I was invited to leave my hotel, and to stay at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Aubrey Burns, of Fairfax, California, whom I had met two days before. I accepted the invitation on condition that they read the book. But I was not prepared for its reception. Mr. Burns sat down and wrote letters to many publishers, and when I was in Toronto (which fact they discovered) Mrs. Burns telephoned me to send the manuscript to California to be typed. They had received some encouraging response to their letters, and were now determined that I should have a typescript and not a manuscript to present to the publisher, for I had less than a week to spend in New York before sailing to South Africa. I air-mailed the manuscript on a Tuesday, but owing to snowstorms no planes flew. The package went by train, broke open and had to be rewrapped, and finally reached an intermediate Post Office on the Sunday, three days before I was due in New York. My friends traced this package to this intermediate Post Office, and had the office opened and the package delivered, by what means I do not know. In the meantime they had friends standing by to do the typing, and they worked night and day, with the result that the first seventeen chapters arrived at the house of Scribner's on Wednesday, a few minutes before myself. On Thursday the next thirteen chapters arrived; and on Friday the last seven chapters, which I had kept with me, were delivered by the typing agency in the afternoon. There was only that afternoon left in which to decide, so it will readily be understood why I dedicate with such pleasure the American edition of this book to these two unselfish and determined friends.

For the benefit of readers I have appended a list of words at the end of the book, which includes by no means all the strange names and words that are used. But it contains those, a knowledge of the meaning and approximately correct pronunciation of which, should add to the reader's enjoyment.

I add too for this same purpose the information that the population of South Africa is about eleven millions, of these about two and a half million are white Afrikaans-speaking,

and three-quarters of a million are white English-speaking. There are also about 250,000 Indians, mostly in Natal, and it is the question of their status that has brought South Africa into the lime-light of the world. The rest, except for one million colored people, by which we mean of mixed blood, are the black people of the African tribes. Johannesburg is referred to as the "great city"; this is judged by South African standards. Its population is about 700,000, but it is a fine modern city, to be compared with any American city except the very greatest. The Umzimkulu is called the "great river," but it is in fact a small river in a great valley. And lastly, a judge in South Africa presides over a Supreme Court; the presiding officer of a lower court is called a magistrate.

SECOND AUTHOR'S NOTE

IT IS SOME eleven years since the first Author's Note was written. The population of South Africa today is estimated to be about 15,000,000, of whom 3,000,000 are white, $1\frac{1}{4}$ millions are colored people, nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ million are Indians, and the rest are Africans. I did not mention the Indians in the first Author's Note largely because I did not want to confuse readers unnecessarily, but the existence of this minority is now much better known throughout the world because their position has become so desperate under apartheid legislation.

The City of Johannesburg has grown tremendously and today contains about $1\frac{1}{4}$ million people.

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer died in 1958, and his place has been taken by his very able son, Mr. Harry Oppenheimer.

OCTOBER 27, 1959
NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY may be longer remembered than any other novel of 1948, but not because it fits into any pattern of the modern novel. It stands by itself; it creates rather than follows a tradition. It is at once unashamedly innocent and subtly sophisticated. It is a story; it is a prophecy; it is a psalm. It is passionately African, as no book before it had been; it is universal. It has in it elements of autobiography; yet it is selfless.

Let the reader discover the story for himself. Alan Paton tells something of its pre-publication history in his own author's introduction. The rest is still living history. In the United States, where it first saw print, the book had a small advance sale—3300 copies. It had no book-club fanfare in advance of publication; it never reached the top of the best-seller lists. But it made its way. People discovered it for themselves. They are still discovering it.

In South Africa it had a fantastic success. In that country of barely two million whites and nearly ten million mostly illiterate blacks, its present sale of thirty-odd thousand copies is the equivalent of a sale of more than two million copies in the United States. No other book in South African history ever stirred such an overwhelming response—and the aftermath of this response in the South African conscience is still to be written.

Alan Paton himself is a native son of South Africa, born in Pietermaritzburg in the east coast province of Natal in 1903. His father, a Scots Presbyterian and something of a poet, went out to South Africa as a civil servant just before the Boer War; his mother, though of English stock, was a

third-generation South African. Alan Paton's entire schooling was South African. At college in Pietermaritzburg, he specialized in science and in off hours he wrote poetry. Until the European-American trip on which *Cry, the Beloved Country* came spilling out of his subconsciousness, he had been out of South Africa only once—at twenty-one, when he attended an Empire Students Conference in London, and followed that with a motorcycle trip through England and Scotland.

Just out of college, he wrote two novels—and almost immediately destroyed the manuscripts. He wrote some poetry. In his middle years he wrote serious essays—much such essays as Arthur Jarvis writes in the novel—for liberal South African magazines. It was life, rather than literature, which prepared Paton to write *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

After college Alan Paton taught in good schools—schools established for the sons of the rich, white minority in South Africa. One of them was in Ixopo (in Natal), in those grass-covered hills lovely beyond any singing of it, where the titi-hoya, the bird of the veld, sings in his book. It was there that he met Dorrie Francis, the girl he married, the mother of his two South-African schooled sons. She is also a born South African. Then he went to teach in Pietermaritzburg, and there, when he was about thirty, he suffered a severe attack of enteric fever. His illness gave him time to think. He did not, he decided, want to make a life career of teaching the sons of the rich.

South Africa was in one of its periods of fermenting change in 1934. One of the new reforms transferred all correctional institutions for young people under twenty-one from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Education, and the Minister of Education at that time was one of South Africa's great men, Jan Hofmeyr. Had he lived, Hofmeyr might have succeeded to General Smuts' mantle (he became Deputy Prime Minister in 1939) and perhaps have changed the recent course of South African history. A Boer who dared to tell his fellow Afrikaners that they must give up "thinking

with the blood," must "maintain the essential value of human personality as something independent of race or color," must supplant fear with faith, Hofmeyr was one of Alan Paton's heroes; as a boy Paton had gone camping with him. Later, the South African edition of *Cry, the Beloved Country* was dedicated to Jan Hofmeyr; it appeared three months before Hofmeyr's death. And the only poem which Alan Paton has published since his college days was a poem on the death of Hofmeyr.

So, recovering from his fever, Alan Paton wrote to Hofmeyr asking for a job. Somewhat to his horror, he got it—as principal of Diepkloof Reformatory, a huge prison school for delinquent black boys, set up in a sort of barbed-wire stockade on the edge of South Africa's greatest city, Johannesburg. It was a penitentiary, a place of locked cells and of despair. In ten years, under Hofmeyr's inspiring leadership, Alan Paton transformed the place. The barbed-wire vanished and gardens of geraniums took its place; the bars were torn down; the whole atmosphere changed. Some of these boys made good; and some, like Absalom in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, did not. You will find suggestions of Diepkloof in Alan Paton's novel, and there is a little of Paton himself in the anonymous young white man at the school, as well as in the character of Arthur Jarvis.

The "experiment" lasted more than ten years, a fertile interval, though Paton himself calls it a "period of aridity" in his literary life. He wrote serious articles but no poetry or fiction. Out of the experiment grew Paton's prison-study trip to Scandinavia, England and America which bore such unexpected fruit in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Paton felt so profoundly that he needed a change that he sold his life insurance policies to finance the trip away from Africa.

In Sweden Paton read and was moved by John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. Possibly the reading of that novel turned his mind back to his earlier interest in creative writing. He had at first no plan to write a novel of his own. But, not speaking Swedish, he passed many nights alone in his hotel;

and, as in his bout with enteric fever, he had time to think and wonder. One dark afternoon a friendly stranger took him to see the rose window in the cathedral of Trondheim by torchlight. That somberly glowing experience set the mood. Paton returned to his hotel, sat down at a desk and between five and seven, the whole first chapter of his novel poured out. He did not yet know what the rest of the story was to be. The theme was clear—he had been living it. The story seemed to form itself as he travelled. Parts were written in Stockholm, Trondheim, Oslo, London, and all the way across the United States; it was finished in San Francisco.

Then Paton went home to South Africa, and the book followed him, and changed his life. The next chapter in his life, it is safe to say, will involve more writing, and South Africa. It might involve him in an effort to recall South Africa to the vision of Jan Hofmeyr.

When Alan Paton flew to New York, in October, 1949, to see "Lost in the Stars," the musical play Maxwell Anderson wrote upon themes from *Cry, the Beloved Country*, he spoke to a Book and Author luncheon upon the South African background of his novel. It was an eloquent and revealing profession of faith. To attempt to condense or paraphrase it would be foolish, so, with a few modifications made with Mr. Paton's consent, I quote it at length.

"I was born," he said, "in that country known as the Union of South Africa. The heart of it is a great interior plateau that falls on all sides to the sea. But when one thinks of it and remembers it, one is aware not only of mountains and valleys, not only of the wide rolling stretches of the veld, but of solemn and deep undertones that have nothing to do with any mountain or any valley, but have to do with men. By some these are but vaguely heard and dimly understood; but for others they are never silent, they become ever more obtrusive and dominant, till the stretch of the sky and veld is nothing more than the backdrop against which is being

played a great human drama in which I am deeply involved, my wife and my children, all men and their wives and children, of all colors and tongues, in which all Africa is involved, and all humanity and the world. For no country is now an island, of itself entire.

"There are eleven to twelve million people in the Union of South Africa. Of these only two and one-half million are whiae, three-fifths of these being Afrikaans-speaking, two-fifths English-speaking. There are one million of what we call 'colored' people, the descendants of the racial mixture which took place before white custom and law hardened against it, and forbade it, under the influence of the white man's intense determination to survive on a black continent. There are about one-quarter million Indians, whose forefathers were brought out by the English settlers to work on the sugar farms of Natal. And there are eight million black people, the people of the African tribes.

"The Afrikaans-speaking people are the descendants of the Dutch who first came to the Cape of Good Hope, which Francis Drake, the navigator, described as the fairest cape in all the circumference of the earth. These people did not come to Africa to settle, but the fertile valleys and great mountains of the Cape bound them with a spell.

"The primitive Bushmen and Hottentots could not stand up against this new thing that came out of Europe, and they melted away. But under the influence of the isolation of these vast spaces, and the hardships and loneliness of this patriarchal life, the people from Europe and the language from Holland changed. Something African entered into both people and language, and changed them. This the people themselves recognized and they called themselves the Afrikaners. Their new and simple and flexible and beautiful language they called Afrikaans; their love of this new country was profound and passionate.

"But still another change awaited them. As the Afrikaners moved yet further north they encountered the warlike tribes of the black African people. A long and bloody warfare en-

sued between them. The black men were numerous and savage and determined; the history of this encounter is one of terror and violence. The black people became truly a part of the white man's mind.

"Under the influence of this danger, the Afrikaner attitude toward black men hardened. The safety and survival of the small band of white people were seen as dependent on the rigid separation of white and black. It became the law that the relationship between white and black was to be that between master and servant; and it became the iron law that between white men and black women, between black men and white women, there was to be no other relationship but this. Land was set aside for the conquered tribes, but, as we see so clearly today, never enough.

"Yet another powerful influence entered into the making of the Afrikaner soul. In 1800 the English came to the Cape, during the Napoleonic Wars. They came initially, not as settlers, but as governors, officials, missionaries, teachers, traders, and fortune-seekers. Their attitude to the black man was different from that of the Afrikaner. The black man was not their enemy; he was their business. This fundamental incompatibility between two policies was to influence South African history for many years. It reached a climactic point in 1836, when many of the Afrikaner trekkers, abandoning all that they had so far gained, set out on the greatest trek of all, into the heart of the sub-continent, in order to escape the new and alien culture. There they set up the republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The position now was that the coastal regions of South Africa were English; the great interior plateau was Afrikaner; and on the fringes of both English and Afrikaner worlds lived the black men, doing the white man's work for him, steadily losing the dignity of their old ways of life.

"A new dramatic factor then entered the picture. In the interior of South Africa, in the very heart of the country to which the Afrikaner trekkers had gone to escape British rule, the richest gold of the world was discovered. The great

modern, vigorous city of Johannesburg was born in a collection of tents and huts. Gold-seekers, many of them British, poured into the Transvaal. The Afrikaners watched with fear and anger and despair this new intrusion of the old enemy. The newcomers wanted the franchise; the Afrikaners dared not give it to them. And so a second great climax arrived, the Anglo-Boer War in 1899. The century-long incompatibility of a pastoral, agricultural, conservative community and a commercial, industrial, 'progressive' community exploded in war.

"In 1902 the Afrikaners capitulated. The British conscience, which was not to permit the British Crown ever again to engage in such a war, achieved the magnanimous settlement of 1906, by which self-government was restored to the defeated republics. A great wave of goodwill spread throughout the country, and four years later the Cape of Good Hope, the Orange Free State, the Transvaal and Natal came together to form the Union of South Africa, under the leadership of three defeated Afrikaner generals, General Botha, General Smuts and General Hertzog.

"But reconciliation was not so easily achieved. War, even when it is followed by magnanimity, leaves wounds not so easily healed. Twenty thousand Afrikaner women and children had died in the camps set up for their reception, mostly of typhoid fever. This was not easily forgotten. More important, the Afrikaner still feared that he and his world would be swallowed up and lost in the great British culture. He also saw a danger that the traditional English policy of *laissez-faire* toward the black people might lead to his engulfment.

"So the Afrikaner again set about to re-establish his separateness and distinctness. He established cultural societies for the protection of his customs, history and language. And he succeeded magnificently, largely because of his fiery independent spirit, and also because the ballot box had been put into his hands by his British enemy. Thus emerged what is today known as Afrikaner nationalism, the persistent and

implacable urge that eventually, in 1948, defeated General Smuts, to the astonishment of every part of the civilized world.

"In the mean time the position of the black people had been changing beyond recognition. The cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban boomed; inevitably they attracted from the impoverished native reserves a never-ending stream of black people seeking work and city lights. They saw and envied the white man's world—his wealth, his comfort and his alien ways; meanwhile their own ancient tribal controls had been weakening. Their young men went astray; their old men were troubled and puzzled. Crime increased; the racial character deteriorated in the wretched hovels where the black men huddled in the slums of the white man's cities. This is the central theme of my novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

"As the black men began to pour into the cities, the white people of South Africa became more and more reminded of the dangers of engulfment. This was one of the great reasons why white South Africans put the Nationalists in power. Afraid of the possible consequences of the laissez-faire policy of the Smuts government, they voted in favor of a party that advocated stern control and strict separation of the races as the 'only solution' of South Africa's ever more complicated and difficult problems.

"So South Africa returned, for the time at least, to the old policy of 'survival and separation.' It is the white settler on a black continent, aware of his precariousness of tenure, who speaks today through the mouthpiece of the Malan government.

"But one must not imagine that this white settler is motivated solely by fear. He too, is a human creature. He has not lived upon the earth without being influenced by the great human ideas, notably by the ideas of Christianity. Therefore, he too is a divided creature, torn between his fears for his own safety and his desire for his own survival on the one hand, and on the other, by those ideas of justice and