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Cry, the Beloved Country, 1949.

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"CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY"

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"Cry, the Beloved Country" is a book about the race tension in South Africa. Our own country knows the problem of race tensions - has known it for centuries. Ours was a slave-holding nation for decades after its founding as a republic. And it took a civil war to put an end to slavery in the United States. But it did not put an end to the exploitation of the colored man in the United States and to his segregation in many parts of the country. Our own country has known the problem of white leadership and black bondage and the evils of exploitation and segregation in terms of slums and crime and vice. And in our country this bitter struggle is still going on. In the Senate of the United States at this moment a filibuster is being carried on to make it impossible to pass legislation on civil rights for all citizens of the United States. During the last election the major political party was rift over this issue. The problem of race tensions does not exist in our country alone. This problem exists everywhere where the white man moved in upon a native population and enslaved him - in Asia, Africa, South and Central America, and in the sub-continent.

For 400 years Western Europe grew rich and powerful through colonization, through the wealth sweated out of the life and labor of backward peoples, and the powerful, rich families of Europe and in the Western Hemisphere filled their coffers from the slave labor of many peoples.

South Africa is one of these countries which has a very tense race problem today. It is one of the countries where the Europeans moved in and proceeded to build his power upon the backs of the black natives. South Africa is a very rich country. It is the largest gold and diamond country in the world. 35% of the gold mined in the world is mined in South Africa. It is a blessed country - blessed by God. It could have become a beloved country by all of its people. There is enough wealth there to have made the entire population of 10,000,000 rich and

prosperous, but that is not the way of the white conqueror. Guilt bars sharing. The 2,000,000 white Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking of South Africa have grabbed up all there is of economic power and political authority, and the natives are a segregated political unenfranchized mass of humanity. Many of these natives who, from time immemorial lived in their own villages, have been uprooted from their villages as a result of the industrialization of South Africa which set in with the discovery of gold, and the younger men and women went into the gold mines and these were herded into compounds where they lived separated from their families. A breakdown of tribal life has set in which has resulted in the ~~tribal~~ ~~life~~ loss of the system and the restraining of traditions, however primitive they were with nothing to substitute for them. As a result immorality and crime and vice are rampant among these natives of South Africa.

The city which gives the white man certain cultural advantages gives the native nothing but insecurity and spiritual confusion and moral hazards. Now this breakdown of native life under the white man's hegemony is not always planned by the white man. It is the inevitable by-product of an unplanned economic process which by-product the white man himself frequently deprecates and here and there the evils are attacked by brave men and women who love their fellowmen more than gold and profit. Here and there wise statesmen arise who look ahead towards a just and peaceful solution of this problem. But they are unfortunately few in number while the indifference about them and the opposition are colossal.

Above all, fear - the fear of this privileged minority - causes the members of this white minority group to think not intelligently and to plan not wisely, and often drives them into a mood of intransigence which violence and revolution alone can shake.

Now, this moving novel called "Cry, the Beloved Country", written by Alan Paton is based on the race problem of South Africa. It is beautifully written with a fresh and lyrical, unusual style, captivating by its moving prose. This book is a social document made vivid and illuminating because it is cast in the form of a novel. It is not a propaganda tract unless the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount might be called so. This book is not a work of a radical agitator. It is a human treatment of a social condition which brings tragedy to white and black alike, and for which the author has no quick and ready solution except as he realizes that love and charity are the essential ingredients in any solution of such a problem. The author endeavors to reach down to the fundamental causes of those conditions responsible for the evils which he depicts and tries to suggest possible ways of experimenting toward some basic solution. He sees the physical and the spiritual desecration of his beloved country and tries to find the comfort, the ray of life, the dawn of emancipation "from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear".

Essentially, the novel is a story of two fathers, one black and one white, who are tangled into one common tragedy, and it is the story of how these two move along the terrible road from deep heart to deep compassion, and how they find themselves and each other and work in the world. The black father is an Anglican minister, poor, humble - Stephen Kumalo - who presides over a dirty old wood and iron church in some out of the way village in Natal where life is hard, and the land eroded and no longer able to sustain its people, from which many of the young people have left for the cities where they are lost. This minister's own sister as well as brother have for years lived in Johannesburg, but he has not heard from them in all the years, and his only son, Absalom, has also left and never returned, and he has never heard from him. This priest, man of God, is a

very humble man with a vast capacity for suffering. He receives a letter from a fellow priest in Johannesburg who advises him that his sister is very sick and urged him to come quickly, and so the priest takes all of his capital which he has been saving for the needs of his own household, and travels to Johannesburg, and there he learned that sister is not physically sick, having been forsaken by her husband. She is now a woman of the streets and lives with a child in a house of ill fame. Kumalo sets about to rescue his sister from her condition, moves her to another home preparatory to taking them back to his own village.

And then he sets about looking for his brother and finds him to be a cheap, professional Negro agitator of bad character, who talks big, full of windy eloquence, with no brains and no moral convictions who is intent only upon exploiting the Negroes. Kumalo sees through his brother for he is persuaded as is his fellow priest, who summoned him to Johannesburg - they are persuaded that there is only one hope for our country, and that is when white and black desire only the good of their country, come together to work it out.

But the greatest disillusionment besets Kumalo when he tries to find his son, Absalom. He has great difficulty tracing him down. He hears that he has fallen in with bad company, and is finally directed to the slum area of Johannesburg and there learns his son had been sent to a reformatory, and when he gets there, learns that his son had been discharged a month ago especially because he wished to marry a girl who, although unmarried, was to become the mother of his child. He ^{visits} ~~meets~~ the girl and learns that Absalom had left her a few days before. Kumalo decides that as soon as possible this girl, if willing, should marry his son and that he would take both with him back to the village to rebuild their broken lives. But one evening, while reading the newspaper, he comes across the headlines that a well-known city engineer, a white man, had been shot in his home,

and the assailants are thought to be natives. This engineer is named Arthur Jarvis, a friend of the black man and a leader in many movements. Kumalo does not know this man, but knows his father, James Jarvis, for the father has his farm in the fertile hills above the village where Kumalo conducts his mission. This victim, Arthur Jarvis, has left a widow and two children. Johannesburg is in an uproar over this foul murder. There is a clamor for more police and heavier sentences. Fear is gripping the city. On the other hand, there are a few voices which call attention to the basic causes which led to such a thing among the black men. The police quickly trace down the murderer. It is Absalom, the son of Kumalo. They arrest him and Kumalo, after many years, finally meets his son in prison. They are now strangers to one another. Kumalo was unable to reach his son really. He finds no pity in him for what he had done.

In the midst of this tragedy Kumalo thinks of the girl who is about to give birth to the child. He would like his son to marry her so that he could at least take back the girl and the child to his village and rebuild her life and build the life of his grandchild. In his great tragedy Kumalo finds sympathy and help among some of the white people, and is particularly comforted because one great lawyer of South Africa offers to be his attorney for his son "pro deo" and to take nothing for the case. That is the black father and his tribulation.

Word is sent to the white father, James Jarvis. The tragedy almost crushes the father. He leaves for Johannesburg, and when he arrives and begins inquiries, he learns for the first time of the great interest which his son had manifested in the plight of the black man in South Africa; how he urged better schools, hospitals, village life in place of compounds. His son had been writing many articles in this cause, and he had shown great courage in challenging the indifference of the people about him. The father visits his son's home, looks over his library, finds more

than 100 books on Abraham Lincoln and a portrait of Lincoln on his desk. And he comes upon a manuscript written by his son which moves the father. It is an incomplete essay written shortly before his murder, and it reads:

What we did when we came to South Africa was permissible. It was permissible to develop our great resources with the aid of what labour we could find. It was permissible to use unskilled men for unskilled work. But it is not permissible to keep men unskilled for the sake of unskilled work.

It was permissible when we discovered gold to bring labour to the mines. It was permissible to build compounds and to keep women and children away from the towns. It was permissible as an experiment, in the light of what we knew. But in the light of what we know now, with certain exceptions, it is no longer permissible. It is not permissible for us to go on destroying family life when we know that we are destroying it.

It is permissible to develop any resources if the labour is forthcoming. But it is not permissible to develop any resources if they can be developed only at the cost of the labour. It is not permissible to mine any gold, or manufacture any product, or cultivate any land, if such mining and manufacture and cultivation depend for their success on a policy of keeping labour poor. It is not permissible to add to one's possessions if these things can only be done at the cost of other men. Such development has only one true name, and that is exploitation. It might have been permissible in the early days of our country, before we became aware of its cost, in the disintegration of native community life, in the deterioration of native family life, in poverty, slums, and crime. But now that the cost is known, it is no longer permissible.

It was permissible to leave native education to those who wanted to develop it. It was permissible to doubt its benefits. But it is no longer permissible in the light of what we know. Partly because it made possible industrial development, and partly because it happened in spite of us, there is now a large urbanised native population. Now society has always, for reasons of self-interest if for no other, educated its children so that they grow up law-abiding, with socialized aims and purposes. There is no other way that it can be done. Yet we continue to leave the education of our native urban society to those few Europeans who feel strongly about it, and to deny opportunities and money for its expansion. That is not permissible. For reasons of self-interest alone, it is dangerous.

It was permissible to allow the destruction of a tribal system that impeded the growth of the country. It was permissible to believe that its destruction was inevitable. But it is not permissible to watch its destruction, and to replace it by nothing, or by so little, that a whole people deteriorates, physically and morally.

And the father reads on the writings of his son's soul, his vision and his life's dedication, and he begins to understand that the best thing he could do to serve the memory of his son is to carry on his spirit as far as he is able.

The trial of Absalom takes place. The verdict is guilty and Absalom is sentenced to be hanged. Looking for distant relatives Kumalo accidentally meets James Jarvis - the black father meets the white father, both in the grip of the tragedy, one whose son is a murderer and the other, whose son was murdered. They meet and Jarvis sees Kumalo.

The suffering in the old man's face smote him, so that he said, sit down, umfundisi. Then the old man would be able to look at the ground, and he would not need to look at Jarvis, and Jarvis would not need to look at him, for it was uncomfortable to look at him. So the old man sat down and Jarvis said to him, not looking at him, there is something between you and me, but I do not know what it is.

Umunuzana.

You are in fear of me, but I do not know what it is. You need not be in fear of me.

It is true, umnumzana. You do not know what it is.

I do not know, but I desire to know.

I doubt if I could tell it, umnumzana.

You must tell it, umfundisi. Is it heavy?

It is very heavy, umnumzana. It is the heaviest thing of all my years.

He lifted his face, and there was in it suffering that Jarvis had not seen before. Tell me, he said, it will lighten you.

I am afraid, umnumzana.

I see you are afraid, umfundisi. It is that which I do not understand. But I tell you, you need not be afraid. I shall not be angry. There will be no anger in me against you.

Then, said the old man, this thing that is the heaviest thing of all my years, is the heaviest thing of all your years also.

Jarvis looked at him, at first bewildered, but then something came to him. You can only mean one thing, he said, you can mean only one thing. But I still do not understand.

It was my son that killed your son, said the old man.

So they were silent. Jarvis left him and walked out into the trees of the garden. He stood at the wall and looked out over the veld, out to the great white dumps of the mines, like hills under the sun. When he turned to come back, he saw that the old man had risen, his hat in one hand, his stick in the other, his head bowed, his eyes on the ground. He went back to him.

I have heard you, he said. I understand what I did not understand. There is no anger in me.

The father, Kumalo, seeks the girl, whether she would marry Absalom, and they are married in the prison chapel, and Kumalo has his last interview with his son, and they become much closer to one another. He promises his son that he will take care of his child, and Kumalo returns to his desolate village, and so does the white father return to his farm, but before doing so he leaves with a friend 1,000 pounds to be spent on those projects in which his son had been interested, projects for the benefit of the black man.

Kumalo is welcomed back to his village. He had been afraid to return knowing that the people knew his son was a murderer, that he was bringing back the child of his sister whose reputation had reached the village, that he was bringing back the wife of a murderer. But his people welcomed him kindly. Kumalo says he is prepared to leave if that is what they wish him to do, but they do not wish it. The white father, on returning to his village, sets about putting into practice what he had learned from his son. He brings a surveyor to build a dam, an agricultural administrator to teach the farmers how to farm their fields so that erosion would be prevented; he sets about rebuilding the valley as a memorial to his son.

When Mrs. Jarvis dies broken-hearted, the father receives a letter from Kumalo:

Umunzana,

We are grieved here at this church to hear that the mother has passed away, and we understand it and suffer with tears. We are certain also that she knew of the things you have done for us, and did something in it. We shall pray in this church for the rest of her soul, and for you also in your suffering.

Your faithful servant,
REV. S. KUMALO

The day he sent that letter to the white father, the Bishop of his church came and suggested that Kumalo leave the village. He felt that because of what had taken place, because of Harvis' having his farm in close proximity to the village, it would be better for Kumalo to go elsewhere, and Kumalo agrees. But shortly thereafter he receives a reply to his letter to Jarvis.

Umfundisi,

I thank you for your message of sympathy, and for the promise of the prayers of your church. You are right, my wife knew of the things that are being done, and had the greatest part in it. These things we did in memory of our beloved son. It was one of her last wishes that a new church should be built at Ndotsheni, and I shall come to discuss it with you.

Yours truly,
JAMES JARVIS

P.S. You should know that my wife was suffering before we went to Johannesburg.

The Bishop understands, of course, that Kumalo is to remain, and Kumalo remains and on the day when his son is to be hanged, Kumalo goes up into the mountains to await the dawn which was the signal for the death of his son. And on his way up to the mountains he meets for the last time Jarvis.

Now it was almost dark, and he was alone in the dusk; which was well, for one did not go publicly on a journey of this nature. But even as he started to climb the path that ran through the great stones, a man on a horse was there, and a voice said to him, it is you umfundisi?

It is I, umnumzana.

Then we are well met, umfundisi. For here in my pocket I have a letter for the people of your church. He paused for a moment, and then he said, The Flowers were of great beauty, umfundisi.

I thank you, umnumzana.

And the church, umfundisi. Do you desire a new church?

Kumalo could only smile and shake his head, there were no words in him. And though he shook his head as if it were No, Jarvis understood him.

The plans will shortly come to you, and you must say if they are what you desire.

I shall send them to the Bishop, umnumzana.

You will know what to do. But I am anxious to do it quickly, for I shall be leaving this place.

Kumalo stood shocked at the frightening and desolating words. And although it was dark, Jarvis understood him, for he said swiftly, I shall be often here. You know I have a work in Ndotsheni. Tell me, how is the young man?

He works night and day. There is no quietness in him.

The white man laughed softly. That is good, he said. Then he said gravely, I am alone in my house, so I am going to Johannesburg to live with my daughter and her children. You know the small boy?

Indeed, umnumzana, I know him.

Is he like him?

He is like him, umnumzana.

And then Kumalo said, Indeed, I have never seen such a child as he is.

Jarvis turned on his horse, and in the dark the grave silent man was eager. What do you mean, he asked.

Umnumzana, there is a brightness inside him.

Yes, yes, that is true. The other was even so.

And then he said, like a man with hunger, do you remember?

And because this man was hungry, Kumalo, though he did not well remember, said, I remember.

They stayed there in silence till Jarvis said, umfundisi, I must go. But he did not go. Instead he said, Where are you going at this hour?

Kumalo was embarrassed, and the words fell about on his tongue, but he answered, I am going into the mountain.

Because Jarvis made no answer he sought for words to explain it, but before he had spoken a word, the other had already spoken. I understand you, he said, I understand completely.

And because he spoke with compassion, the old man wept, and Jarvis sat embarrassed on his horse. Indeed he might have come down from it, but such a thing is not lightly done. But he stretched his hand over the darkening valley, and he said, One thing is about to be finished, but here is something that is only begun. And while I live it will continue. Umfundisi, go well.

Ummumzana!

Yes

Do not go before I have thanked you. For the young man, and the milk. And now for the church.

I have seen a man, said Jarvis with a kind of grim gaiety, who was in darkness till you found him. If that is what you do, I give it willingly.

Perhaps it was something deep that was here, or perhaps the darkness gives courage, but Kumalo said, truly, of all the white men that I have ever known -

I am no saintly man, said Jarvis fiercely.

Of that I cannot speak, but God put His hands on you.

And Jarvis said, That may be, that may be. He turned suddenly to Kumalo. Go well, umfundisi. Throughout this night, stay well.

And Kumalo cried after him, Go well, go well.

And they part and Kumalo climbs up to the mountain to await the dawn. He looked out of his clouded eyes but he calms himself and gave himself over to deep

prayer and raised his eyes and looked to the East. The first ray would mean the hanging of his son. And finally he knew the time was not far off, and when he expected it, he rose to his feet, took off his hat, clasped his hands before him and while he stood there, the sun rose in the East.

Yes, it is the dawn that has come. The titihoya wakes from sleep, and goes about its work of forlorn crying. The sun tips with light the mountains of Ingeli and East Griqualand. The great valley of the Umzinkulu is still in darkness, but the light will come there. Ndotsheni is still in darkness, but the light will come there also. For it is the dawn that has come, as it has come for a thousand centuries, never failing. But when that dawn will come, of our emancipation, from the fear of bondage and the bondage of fear, why, that is a secret.

And it is on that note that the book ends; a book of tensions between races and how compassion and love and charity can help men of different races across the gulf of great tragedy to understand one another and to help one another. "Cry, the Beloved Country" - the cry is there; the tribulation is there, but this is the ray of hope - this is the note of prayer.

