

**WOLFNOTE SUMMARY OF...**

## **ALAN PATON'S CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY**



### **THE AUTHOR – ALAN PATON (1903 – 1988)**

James and Eunice Paton, from England, settled in Natal Province, South Africa and they had a son, Alan born to them on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1903.

They lived in the city of Pietermaritzburg and their eldest child, Alan lived a contented childhood, being both active and intelligent.

At the age of twenty-two, Alan commenced a teaching career, firstly teaching at a native school in the village of Ixopo. He had graduated from the University of Natal where he had shown promise as a poet, but he was not satisfied with his early writings and these were mainly destroyed by him. He gave up his teaching career in order to take on the post as Principal at the Diepkloof Reformatory where he attempted to bring more freedom to the oppressive regime at this institution. He was concerned in ensuring that the boys received a proper education in order to prepare them for life outside the Reformatory walls. Dedicated to this area of work, he was determined to find out how such institutions operated outside South Africa and he traveled extensively.

Whilst traveling in Scandinavia, the idea behind the book, 'Cry, The Beloved Country' was born, and he added to this original thought over several years until the final book was published in 1948.

The onset of World War II had curtailed Paton's reforms for the Diepkloof Institution, but after the war, Paton started on an ambitious program to revolutionize prisons and reform schools in South Africa.

'Cry, The Beloved Country' became popular throughout the English speaking world, in particular in the United States, where similarities were evident to Steinbeck's 'Grapes of Wrath'. The book was also adapted for the stage and the motion picture industry, the film being released in 1952. Paton wrote various books including 'Too Late the Phalarope' published in 1953, 'The Land and the People of South Africa' published in 1955, 'Hope for South Africa' published in 1959, and 'Jan Hofmeyr' a biography of Paton's friend, the former Deputy Prime Minister of South Africa published in 1965.

Throughout his life Paton showed concern about the political regime in South Africa and he helped form the Liberal Party and was the Party President for a time. He became more and more outspoken and this led to him being charged with Treason in 1960, and his Passport was revoked. The Liberal Party was outlawed by the South African Government, which led to its eventual dissolution in 1968. With others, Paton was involved in the famous Treason Trials alongside Albert Luthule who was the Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg and Nobel Prize-winner. Although the victims of these Trials were eventually set free from prison, Paton was not allowed to travel outside of South Africa for many years.

Throughout his life, Alan Paton spoke out against the injustices suffered by the Black majority of South Africa.

He died at his home near Durban in 1988. The Times Obituary said, "His view of his Century became bleaker: he could foresee only a bloodbath. But his Christian faith sustained him; and although criticized by radical elements, he enjoyed widespread respect as a saintly man who was by no means unworldly."

### **SETTING**

Paton's main purpose in his book 'Cry, the Beloved Country' is to comment on the social standing of the black native Africans and the resulting interface with the ruling minority whites. In order to make his documentary memorable, he incorporates a plot and characters so as to give the book a universal appeal. To some extent the characters and how they develop in the story is secondary to the changes he feels are necessary in order that South Africa makes the transition from a Dutch/British colony to an independent State in Africa.

Paton's viewpoint is from the late 1940's, but to understand how the South Africa of this day evolved, it is necessary to understand its history.

The book is geographically centered on Johannesburg in the Natal Province, which is the homeland of the Zulu nation. There were around 4,000,000 Zulus living in an area of 10,500 sq. miles. They were a proud and handsome people and before the Europeans arrived, they were the ruling power in this area of Africa. Over the centuries, they evolved an efficient tribal system. They originally occupied Central Africa and migrated south to the more fertile areas of country. Their homeland was first invaded by the Dutch who

met fierce resistance, but ultimately they drew back from the unyielding invaders. The British involvement in the area took place in the 1870's, and again this resulted in various battles and the British eventually overran their reduced homeland. There was still unrest in the area up until 1907 and the Colonists' control over the Zulus was always fragile.

South Africa was a rich area fought over by the Dutch, British and Germans, and the Portuguese also ruled Mozambique to the north-east of Natal.

From the European point of view colonization of this area brought "civilization" to the Zulus and other tribes.

From the Zulu point of view, their position as overlords and masters of their own land had been taken away from them and they have been reduced to a subservient race for the bulk of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Dutch settlers, known as Boers, which means farmers, occupied 2 independent states in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and inevitably conflict broke out between them and the British, resulting in the Boer Wars, which started in 1899.

In 1910, all the South African territories were united in the Union of South Africa with a former Boer General, Louis Botha being Prime Minister.

South Africa experienced upheavals in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century up until the time of this book in 1948.

There was a conflict between the Liberal Parties who wished to industrialize South Africa bringing in immigrants to help with this development and bring about a more integrated society. The Nationalist Party opposed this. They wanted to virtually ban any immigration and exert total control over the native population. In the elections of 1948 the Nationalists obtained power with a very narrow majority. Not long after that they began their program of apartheid, which means 'apartness' or complete segregation of the races. Citizens were to be segregated into Europeans, the Indian population, the natives and the colored, the latter being a mix of European and native blood.

## CONTEXT

The book opens at the remote village of Ndotsheni in the Natal Province of Eastern South Africa. It is 1948. The central character is the Reverend Stephen Kumalo who has seen his immediate family fragment and departs to the city of Johannesburg.

Kumalo tries to adhere to the old ways, but the emerging South Africa has brought about the destruction of the tribal communities. Kumalo and his wife mourn the disappearance of their family to the city mainly because they receive no communication from them. When a letter arrives from Johannesburg, they are apprehensive for they suspect that it brings them bad news. The letter is from the Reverend Msimangu who runs a Mission House in Johannesburg. The letter advised Kumalo that his sister has fallen on hard times and has turned to prostitution. Kumalo resolves to journey to Johannesburg to assist his sister and also take the opportunity to discover the whereabouts of his son, Absalom and his brother John. They had both traveled to Johannesburg to search for the sister Gertrude, but both had not returned and had stopped writing.

Life in the big city is far removed from the rustic societies Kumalo has lived in all his life, and the bustling metropolis comes as a shock to him. He is appalled at the enforced segregation and prejudice suffered by the black people. Although he soon discovers his sister who has a son of her own, his quest to find his own son is more difficult. His sister wishes to return to the homeland and Kumalo will help her do this.

It transpires that the Police are also looking for Absalom who has murdered a white man, Arthur Jarvis, who was a leading activist pursuing social justice for all. Absalom is found guilty of the crime and is sentenced to hang.

Kumalo's brother, John, has materially benefited from his transfer to the city, but he has turned his back on the Church and is corrupt.

Kumalo becomes more and more depressed and the only hope he obtains from his time in Johannesburg is through his sister's son, whom he hopes to raise, and his newly acquired pregnant daughter-in-law.

Arthur Jarvis' father James decides to continue his son's work and right the social injustices suffered by the blacks. Coincidentally, he lives on a farm overlooking the village of Ndotsheni and he decides to help the struggling natives who live below. He takes measures to limit the effects of famine on the valley and as the book comes to its conclusion, Kumalo has returned from the city and goes to the mountains to contemplate his son's impending execution.

There he meets with James Jarvis and the two converse regarding the loss of both their sons.

We see that hope is kindled from the evil that has transpired in the city. Jarvis sees hope in the form of his young grandson, and Kumalo obtains hope through his sister's son.

The book ends with Kumalo weeping for his son's death as dawn breaks over Ndotsheni.

## **CHARACTERS**

### **REVEREND STEPHEN KUMALO**

He is the protagonist of the novel, the native priest of the small village of Ndotsheni. The names of some of the characters have significance and we relate to St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr who was stoned to death. Kumalo has seen his immediate family disperse to the sprawling city of Johannesburg. He has seen the old customs decline and the increasing oppression of his people. He is often referred to as 'umfundisi', which is a term used when speaking respectfully to a parson. Kumalo is a good and humble man, but can sometimes lose his temper due to frustration.

### **ABSALOM KUMALO**

Kumalo's son, he soon falls into a life of petty crime after running away to the bright city lights of Johannesburg. He falls into bad company, which eventually leads to the murder of Arthur Jarvis, for which he is convicted and sentenced to death. Along the way, he meets a young girl, but deserts her when she becomes pregnant.

### **GERTRUDE KUMALO**

Kumalo's younger sister by twenty-five years, Gertrude travels to Johannesburg looking for the father of her young son. In order to support the child, she resorts to prostitution.

### **JOHN KUMALO**

He is Kumalo's brother who turns his back on the Church and becomes a powerful and corrupt black politician in Johannesburg. He wishes to play the part of Chief, and keep all the trappings that this would bring.

### **REVEREND MSIMANGU**

He is a kind young priest who runs a Mission House in Johannesburg. Msimangu inspires Kumalo with his good sermons and aids him in his search for his family. He concentrates his efforts in dealing the oppression suffered by his flock.

### **JAMES JARVIS**

He is a wealthy farmer who lives close to Ndotsheni. His son is murdered by Absalom Kumalo and Jarvis dedicates himself to helping the oppressed people of Ndotsheni after his son's death.

### **ARTHUR JARVIS**

The murdered son of James Jarvis, he is a social activist determined to bring social reform to South Africa.

### **MRS. LITHEBE**

Kumalo's landlady in Johannesburg, she becomes a close friend. She takes in Kumalo's sister and child.

### **FATHER VINCENT**

He is an English priest who assists Kumalo in obtaining a defense lawyer for his son.

### **MR. CARMICHAEL**

He is a famous lawyer who takes on Absalom Kumalo's case for free.

## **BOOK 1**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **Context**

This Chapter serves as an introduction and sets the scene providing a description of the countryside surrounding the village of Ndotsheni. Its locality is on the eastern side of South Africa approximately 40 miles inland from the Indian Ocean, occupying a position equidistant from the coast and the country of Basutoland. This is the home of the main character of the story, the Reverend Stephen Kumalo, and we learn of his rustic background and his belief in the old ways of society.

## **BOOK 1**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **Interpretation**

The plot is not started until the next Chapter and the reader will find that the storyline is punctuated with Chapters and passages which merely provide atmosphere, or that state a specific point concerning the factors surrounding South African life at this time.

We are given a taste of Paton's poetic prowess, which is in stark contrast to the narrative.

When the book deals with the advancement of the plot, the style used by Paton is very simplistic. It is designed for easy understanding by the man in the street of South Africa. There are virtually no complex passages in the entire book, and perhaps this is one of the reasons why the book has been successful over the whole spectrum of society, whether in South Africa or further a field.

What we do gather from the first Chapter are the relative situations of whites and the native black population. We see that the whites live on the best land and in some cases look down into the valleys where the natives live on the more barren fields.

Paton uses good symbolism here describing the soil of the hills as being red and as it is washed into the rivers through erosion, it colors the rivers into a blood-red hue symbolizing the suffering of the people who bleed because of the unfair human rights and distribution of land.

You will recall that Paton studied poetry and his symbolic description of the land is shown here, "The great red hills stand desolate, and the earth has torn away like flesh. The lightning flashes over them, the clouds pour down upon them, the dead streams come to life, full of the red blood of the earth. Down in the valleys women scratch the soil that is left, and the maize hardly reaches the height of a man."

## **CHAPTERS 2 – 5**

### **Context**

In the village of Ndotsheni, a small girl delivers a note to the Reverend Stephen Kumalo.

The village is now only occupied by old men and women, or mothers and young children. All the men have gone to the cities to find work. This is the case with Kumalo. His sister, brother, and only son have long since left the small village and this letter he has now received will probably only bring bad news about one of his relations.

The letter is from the Reverend Msimangu who writes to say that Kumalo's sister Gertrude is very ill in Johannesburg. Kumalo resolves to travel to the city and his wife persuades him to use the money they had saved for their son's education. Kumalo is reluctant to do this, but his wife tells him that he will never need to be education, and this makes Kumalo angry. He tries to think the best of his son and suggests that perhaps the white man has not sent on Absalom's letters, but he soon realizes this is wrong, and repents his anger.

The next day, Kumalo boards the train for Johannesburg. He is apprehensive about this journey as he views the city as an evil place that appears to consume so many people without trace. The train passes through the gold mines where so many young native men work long hours for meager pay while the white owners grow fat and rich.

Eventually he arrives in Johannesburg and is confused by the bustling metropolis. He is swindled by a young man who offers to acquire a bus ticket for him. He takes a bus to the Mission House in Sophiatown, a suburb of Johannesburg, and he meets the kind young Msimangu.

The two have a long discussion concerning the problems facing South Africa and how the old values have been lost, and the tribal system has broken down.

Gertrude's illness is not physical, but moral. She has become a prostitute. Kumalo is deeply hurt by this revelation, particularly as she has a young son. Kumalo's brother John has become a powerful politician in Johannesburg, but has turned his back on the Church. Msimangu tries to comfort Kumalo by telling him that the breakdown of his family is similar to the breakdown being suffered all across South Africa.

Msimangu takes Kumalo to Mrs. Lithebe's house who has agreed to take the priest in whilst he stays in Johannesburg.

## **CHAPTERS 2 – 5**

### **Interpretation**

At the end of this note, you will find a glossary of words used in the text. You will note that the small child refers to Reverend Kumalo as 'umfundisi', which is a word used specifically when addressing a pastor and is a token of respect.

We see that Kumalo is a kind man, but not worldly. One of the themes of the book is the fast learning curve he is on concerning the modern South Africa.

There are specific religious overtones in the book regarding the names and occupations of the characters. Kumalo's Christian name is Stephen, and we are reminded of the first Christian martyr St. Stephen who was stoned to death after being convicted of blasphemy. Kumalo's brother is John who was a carpenter, and just like Jesus the carpenter, when he left his village great developments were to take place for him.

Kumalo's only son, Absalom corresponds to King David's son who rebelled against his father. The full significance of these parallels becomes evident as the book progresses.

We learn that Kumalo's sister, Gertrude, is some twenty-five years younger than him, so there is a significant age gap between the two siblings.

We see that Kumalo is quick to anger when his wife reminds him that his son has in fact turned his back on them, the consequence being that he has failed to obtain a proper education, even though Kumalo had saved money to finance his son's education.

This area of South Africa is part of the Zulu homeland, and although the vast majority of the natives are Christian, there are still references to their pagan Zulu past. Instead of using 'God' as an expletive, Kumalo and others use the word 'Tixo', which refers to the Zulu's great spirit.

As you can see, the book is easily read, the dialogue being in the form of short statements, which are almost poetic in construction, but very easy to understand.

Kumalo's journey to Johannesburg is very symbolic. It marks a journey between the simple and the complex, country and city, good and evil, known and unknown. We see Kumalo's naivety in allowing a boy to take his money to obtain a bus ticket so that he does not lose his place in the queue. It is only when he boards the bus that he realizes tickets are acquired from the driver.

Kumalo's conversation with Msimangu shows that the latter is much more sophisticated, and he understands the politics and social problems in the city. To Kumalo, Johannesburg is a new world, and he feels out of place and out of time.

One thing the old minister does sense is that the city is gripped by fear, especially among the native population. This is another main theme of the novel – the fear experienced by the different characters in varying situations.

We learn of the widespread poverty that most of the native people live in, and this is what leads many of them into a life of crime.

As Kumalo journeys to Johannesburg, he feels a growing fear within him, but he learns that his fellow Africans living in the city are also fearful, wondering how they will feed their families and whether they will obtain work or keep the work that they have. However, the whites are also fearful of the blacks. They remember the great Zulu wars of the past, and there is the constant reminder that they are greatly outnumbered by the blacks.

We note that the two ministers agree that the break-up of the tribes is part of the reason for the decline of the native population. The loss of the tribal system has resulted in the old world being broken up, but nothing has been put in its place. The black natives deserted the land that they had husbanded for centuries and which has now fallen into decay in order to go to the city to find that there is nothing there for them.

Kumalo is somewhat disappointed to learn that his sister has become a prostitute, but he feels helpless to do anything constructive about this situation and will, therefore, rely greatly on the benevolent priest Msimangu.

Kumalo had gone to Johannesburg with the aim of finding his dispersed family, reuniting them with one another, and restoring his family unit.

## **CHAPTERS 6 and 7**

### **Context**

The next day, Kumalo and Msimangu seek out Gertrude. Kumalo hopes that she will have news concerning his son Absalom.

Kumalo is shocked by the filth and poverty of the streets where his sister lives. Malnourished children play in the streets without supervision. At first their meeting is frosty, but soon Gertrude comes to life and her brother eventually forgives her, and the pair resolves to stay together. Gertrude desires to return home and this helps lift Kumalo's depression, as he hopes to rebuild his family. He will ask his landlady if she will take Gertrude and her son in until they can return home.

Gertrude does not have details of where Absalom is living, but she heard that he associated with his cousin, John's son. Kumalo decides to seek out his brother, John.

Mrs. Lithebe agrees to take Gertrude and the boy in. She is honored to have a minister in her house for she is a good Christian woman.

Kumalo's first thought on bringing Gertrude out of the slums is to buy her a new dress and clothes for the boy. Gertrude soon settles into her new life in Mrs. Lithebe's house and she helps with the household chores whilst the small boy revels in his new surroundings.

Kumalo then meets with his brother and he has clearly prospered and has grown fat. He acts like one of the old tribal Chiefs and is somewhat pompous. He stresses that he is a man of importance in Johannesburg as he has his own business "I can make £10, £12 a week." John confesses to Kumalo that



his son and Absalom were rebellious and got up to mischief. At one time they shared a room and they had work in a factory called Doornfontein Textiles. Perhaps they would know the whereabouts of Absalom. However, at the factory, although the white men there treated them with consideration, they could only advise that Absalom had left some twelve months earlier. Absalom had been staying with a woman called Mrs. Endlela in a street on the outskirts of Westdene. She told them that Absalom had left and gone to live in Alexandra with Mrs. Nkize.

Kumalo was feeling tired and Msimangu said that they would rest and continue their search next day.

## **CHAPTERS 6 and 7**

### **Interpretation**

Paton is at pains to describe the poverty of the native community in Johannesburg.

It does not require great imagination to visualize the scene in the streets of Claremont where Gertrude lived. From his description of Gertrude we see that her trade has left her spiritually dead. Kumalo just by his presence, rescues her and forgives her, and leads her back to a better way of life. She had not written to her brother because of the shame she felt being forced into prostitution to maintain her son. She had traveled to the city to seek her husband, but was unsuccessful. The sickness that she suffers from is shared by many in these ghettos.

We see a glimmer of hope with the prospect of Stephen's family being rebuilt.

In contrast, John's life is totally different. In the eyes of the Church his way of life is just as corrupt as Gertrude's, and that is why he has turned his back on the Church. He tells Kumalo that he is now free from the tribal system and the ignorant Chiefs that ruled it. He, in fact, acts like a Chief in the city, ordering natives around to do his bidding. He is now full of his own importance, and although he is in a position of power, he does not use this to pursue good, but for corrupt ideals.

Msimangu plays an important part in the book. He is in fact the mouthpiece for the author, and through his dialogue, the reader can identify clearly with the evils prevalent in this society. What John envies is the power that the white man has. He wishes to have a share of this power and be like the white man. It is Msimangu that makes this clear to Kumalo.

## **CHAPTERS 8, 9 and 10**

### **Context**

The search continues for Absalom and Kumalo's learning curve intensifies as he is met with new situations. Alexandra is some eleven miles away and they are not able to take the bus because there is a boycott. Fairs have increased from 4 pence to 6 pence for the journey, and the native community is refusing to pay the increase and is boycotting the buses. Kumalo and Msimangu resolve to walk the distance.

The pair had walked many miles through the city when a car stopped, driven by a white man offering them a lift. The white man is sympathetic towards the bus boycott and many whites assist the blacks by giving those lifts.

Msimangu advises Kumalo concerning the bus boycott and he gives details regarding the leaders of this movement. At the heart of the movement is a man called Dubula who has suffered much, and he is dedicated to bringing reform to the native population. A man called Tomlinson supports him and he is the brains of the movements composing speeches for the public meetings. John's involvement is purely selfish, and he is only in the movement to get out of it as much as he can. Eventually they reach Alexandra, but the landlady only passes them on to a taxi driver.

There is an interruption to the story in Chapter 9, where the reader is given an insight into the suffering of the residents in the shantytown.

They make contact with the taxi driver who is called Hlabeni. He reveals that Absalom was involved in petty crime and that he had been sent to the Reformatory. Kumalo is disappointed that a whole day has passed and he has still not met with his son.

The two travel back to the Mission as it is getting dark and Kumalo obtains some hope from the fact that many white men give lifts to the natives because of the bus boycott. He feels that all cannot be bad in society when there is such kindness.

Kumalo and Msimangu go to the Reformatory where they learn that Absalom was a model inmate. He left there a month earlier, due to his good behavior and also because there was a young girl who was pregnant by him. She visited him often in the institution and the pair seemed genuinely fond of one another. They trace the young girl and she advises Kumalo that Absalom had left a few days ago to go to Springs and has not yet returned. The girl seemed resigned to the fact that she had been deserted. Kumalo felt responsibility for the girl as she carried his grandchild, although Msimangu said that he could not be certain of that.

## **CHAPTERS 8, 9 and 10**

### **Interpretation**

Kumalo's journey through these Chapters in search of his son provides him with more information regarding the society in Johannesburg.

The first instance is the bus boycott where he meets the leader of the movement Dubula. This is really the first black person who is not a minister that Kumalo has met who works for the benefit of the native society. He is dedicated to bringing reform. He poses a real threat to the Government because he cannot be corrupted, unlike John. It is interesting to see how the white people react to the boycott. Some feel threatened at the united front shown by the native population in refusing to pay the fare increase, and so they show solidarity by giving lifts to the black commuters. No doubt some of the whites do this out of compassion for the black people, recognizing the injustice behind the fare increase.

Kumalo's search for Absalom is punctuated with fear, in particular from the landlady who does not wish to be implicated with Absalom. She refers Kumalo to the taxi driver. Kumalo is slowly coming to terms with the fact that his son has left his work in the factory in order to pursue a life of crime. His journey takes him to the Reformatory where he is given some hope with the news that his son was a model inmate, and that he appeared to be loyal to a young girl he had made pregnant. However, it transpires that he has deserted the girl when they locate her.

Chapter 9 is similar to Chapter 1 in that it does not enable to plot to develop, but merely is a series of short, abrupt scenes that document the misery endured by the natives in the shantytown. Their lives are a day-to-day struggle for survival. If the reader did not realize it before, Chapter 9 brings it home that this book is not just a story concerning the Kumalo family, but about the greater picture of South African life in 1948 and right through the years of apartheid. Perhaps the point that Paton is making is that peaceful revolt through bus boycotts and shantytown life will bring a more positive response from the white man in the street, whereas violence would only increase oppression.

Although much of this part of the book deals with Kumalo's search for his son, he does take time out to converse with his sister and her son. In the young boy he sees hope for the future and perhaps he can do more for his nephew than he did for Absalom.

We are mindful that Paton tries to strike a balance, and so far his criticism of the system in South Africa at this time is aimed at the Government. Paton also views the Reformatory in a positive light where the staff members are shown as kind and constructive, and it is clear that Absalom responded positively to this approach whilst he was there. The Director of the Reformatory assists Kumalo in locating Absalom's girlfriend, and we sense that he is just as disappointed in Absalom's desertion as Kumalo is.

Paton also paints a poignant picture of the young girl who has been born and bred in Johannesburg. There seems to be no happiness in her, and she has been reduced to the depths by the degradation that surrounds her.

## **CHAPTERS 11 – 14**

### **Context**

The Evening Star newspaper carries a tragic headline, "Well-known City Engineer Shot Dead. Assailants thought to be natives."

Msimangu is shocked at this terrible news, for Arthur Jarvis was a brave young white man and one of the stalwarts of the fight for justice for all South African people. He was in fact President of the African Boys' Club in Claremont. Jarvis was regarded as one of the main bridges between whites and blacks in Johannesburg.

Father Vincent, another local white minister from England, asks Kumalo if he knows Jarvis' father, James, as he owns the farm overlooking Kumalo's home village. Kumalo admits that he does know James Jarvis and sympathizes with him, as Arthur was his only son.

Kumalo sinks into a deep depression. Since his arrival in Johannesburg he has been bombarded with one distressing episode after another and he sees no hope in the situation apart from Gertrude's boy. He had known that the situation between the whites and the blacks could be better, but he hadn't realized how poor relationships were between the two races until he arrived in Johannesburg.

Noting Kumalo's depression, Msimangu comforts Kumalo and tells him that the young white man at the Reformatory will do a good job in searching for Absalom. They will allow the young man time to make his research and will visit with him again in a few days. Msimangu has to conduct a service at Ezenzeleni, which is an institute for the blind, and he suggests the Kumalo accompanies him as he might find it interesting. Kumalo is lifted by his visit to Ezenzeleni where he witnesses how well blacks and whites can work together, and he is moved by the care given to the blind natives. Kumalo is introduced to the European Superintendent of the Institute, who showed him round the facility.

He had time to contemplate all that had happened to him and Kumalo's thoughts turned to his son's girlfriend and the unborn child that would be his grandchild. He was more determined than ever to see through his quest to rebuild his family, which involved Gertrude and her son, and his own son, the girl and the unborn child.

In the afternoon, Msimangu conducted his service and Kumalo was inspired by the young minister's sermon. The sermon was well received by the congregation and at the end Kumalo told Msimangu that his depression was lifted.

Kumalo returned to Mrs. Lithebe, who had found a buyer for Gertrude's possessions, and these were sold for £3, which was a good bargain.

The young man from the Reformatory arrived with the news that it was a Reformatory boy, Absalom, and two others, one being his cousin (John's son) who had committed the crime of murdering Jarvis, but apparently it was Absalom that had fired the shot. The young man was concerned what the repercussions would be for the Reformatory. He informed Kumalo that the three boys had been arrested.

Arrangements were made for Kumalo to visit the prison, but on the way there, Kumalo wished to break the news of what had happened to his brother. John's reaction to the news was to blame Absalom entirely for the crime and try to free his own son.

The two brothers make their way to the prison. When they arrive they are taken to separate rooms to meet with their sons.

Kumalo asks Absalom, "Why did you do this terrible thing, my child?" The son confides in his father that it was through fear that he fired the gun. He did not mean to kill the white man. Kumalo goes on to ask Absalom about his girlfriend, and whether he wishes to marry her. He does and Kumalo hopes that this can be arranged whatever the outcome of the trial. The father comforts his fearful son and confirms that he will stand by him. Kumalo leaves his son and meets up with his brother.

John is concerned about obtaining a lawyer for his son. He is preoccupied regarding his problems and does not offer to help Kumalo.

Kumalo then remembers words spoken to him by Father Vincent back at the Mission when the news broke about the murder. He offered help them, and Kumalo resolves to seek this help.

## **CHAPTERS 11 – 14**

### **Interpretation**

The previous Chapters have provided the ingredients that lead to the high degree of lawlessness among the black community. Many whites attribute the crime-wave to the nature of black people considering that they are inherently evil. This is an ignorant standpoint. The lawlessness stems from the fact that the black community suffers social degradation and many young black males will not work year after year for a pittance, and see the only way to improve their situation through a life of crime.

The murder of Arthur Jarvis is ironic, for he is one of the few white people who endeavor to bring justice and social reform to all the people, and his death severely damages this cause.

In these Chapters there are several passages that are statements regarding the situation in South Africa and have no direct relationship to the plot development. From one of these passages comes the title of the book and we read, "Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers, nor stand too silent when the setting sun makes red the veld with fire." This passage stresses the change taking place from the old values into a regime where there is nothing to hold together the people. The result is chaos, for the native people have seen the rules devalued and ignored and they are without guidance.

Paton indicates that trouble is mounting in Johannesburg and that crime is escalating. He views the increased Police suppression as exacerbating the situation. It is not just the whites that fear the increase in lawlessness. The god-fearing native population shares their fear as well.

The storm that Kumalo has faced since his arrival in the city ceases during his visit to Ezenzeleni. He is cheered-up by the scene of the whites helping the blind black natives, and he is inspired by Msimangu's sermon. He is given renewed strength to pursue his quest, which now seems clearer to him. He is also determined to take a more active role in the education of his own people back home. Msimangu's sermon enables Kumalo to obtain a better understanding of the suffering endured by his people. Kumalo is impressed by the young minister's unselfish devotion to his flock.

Kumalo has had to come to terms with the fact that his sister was a prostitute and his brother is a corrupt businessman. Now he is faced with the shock that his son is a murderer. It is with some trepidation that he journeys to the prison to meet his son. Although he was able to break down the barrier between himself and his sister, the task with Absalom will be much greater.



His brother, John, is seen in a true light, having no regard for his brother's situation. He is only concerned with saving his own son. If he can show no loyalty to his family, how can he show any loyalty towards his people?

The scene in the prison between Kumalo and Absalom is quite touching and poignant, and despite Kumalo's initial fears, the pair is soon reconciled. Kumalo can see that his son genuinely regrets his actions, and reading between the lines, Jarvis' death is an unfortunate accident caused by Absalom's fear. We suspect that John's son has led him astray.

We note that Kumalo will seek help from Father Vincent, another caring white man.

## **CHAPTERS 15 and 16**

### **Context**

Kumalo returns to Mrs. Lithebe's lodgings drained and dispirited.

The two women sense Kumalo's depression and leave him to contemplate the recent events in silence.

The young man who brought the news comes to Mrs. Lithebe's house to speak with Kumalo. He wishes to discuss the arrangements concerning a lawyer for Absalom. Although Absalom has admitted the crime, it is important that he has a lawyer because the young man does not trust John Kumalo, and it is important that the court believes Absalom's story. The young man takes Kumalo back to the Mission House so that the pair can talk with Father Vincent. Father Vincent comforts the old man and he shows that he is an unselfish man. He undertakes to obtain a lawyer for Absalom and to arrange his marriage to the young pregnant girl. Kumalo feels that he is not carrying this burden alone and he is very grateful to Father Vincent for assisting him.

The next day, Kumalo resolves to seek out Absalom's girlfriend. He learns that the girl has lived her entire life in Johannesburg and she tells Kumalo that she has had three boyfriends, all of whom have ended up in prison. As a result, the only way she can get kindness and attention is to offer herself sexually. Whether it is through stress or depression, Kumalo performs a cruel act towards the girl. He asks her if she would be willing to go to bed with him and she indicates, yes. Kumalo immediately feels regret for this action and suddenly feels overwhelming compassion for the girl. He asks her if she is willing to marry his son and he tells her that she cannot carry on living here, and that he will find a place for her to stay close by the Mission. He tells her to make preparations for the move.

## **CHAPTERS 15 and 16**

### **Interpretation**

We now see the significance of the names given to his characters by Paton.

Just as St. Stephen endured the stoning and prolonged agony, so Kumalo endures the agony of his son's plight. You will recall that Absalom rebelled against his father King David. John the Baptist prophesied the coming of Jesus, being his cousin, and there are similarities here between the relationship of Stephen and John.

We wonder how Kumalo would cope without the assistance he has received firstly from Msimangu, and now Father Vincent. Both have supplied practical help.

The girl's story in Chapter 16 gives a real insight into the problems faced by people who have lost the continuity of family life. She is apparently alone and can only find any sort of relationship by giving herself sexually.

We see a lapse from Stephen when he acts cruelly towards the girl, brought on by his depression. This marks the lowest point of his spirit, and despite the tragedies that are to come, Kumalo seems determined to rise above the situation. He comes to the realization that he cannot change the world; he can only do the best he can for those around him.

The compassion shown towards him by those at the Mission House rubs off on Kumalo, and from here on in, he becomes a more caring and complete person.

## **CHAPTER 17**

### **Context**

Mrs. Lithebe has become a good friend of Kumalo and she provides him with support and sympathy which eases Stephen's suffering. She has on occasions found it necessary to scold Gertrude because of her raucous laughing, but by and large the two women get on well together.

Kumalo visits his son again in prison and they form a deep, close bond with one another. Just as with Gertrude, he is able to bring back some spirit to his son.

Father Vincent advises Kumalo that he has obtained the services of a famous lawyer, Mr. Carmichael who will not charge for taking Absalom's case. Father Vincent says that Carmichael takes the case, "Pro Deo" in other words, "He takes it for God."

## **CHAPTER 17**

### **Interpretation**

We see that Mrs. Lithebe helps support Kumalo, as his suffering is similar to that of his namesake St. Stephen.

Gertrude appears to get on well with Mrs. Lithebe, but she still requires discipline, and there is a hint that she may not be able to put up with this situation on a long-term basis.

It is ironic that Kumalo has been able to communicate with his son, even although it is under such unfortunate circumstances. Perhaps if he had found his son sooner, the tragedy of Jarvis' death might not have happened.

At this stage, the reader only sees the negative side of Absalom's mindless act, but hopes that some good will come out of this dire situation.

Again Paton introduces yet another benevolent white man in the form of Carmichael, a leading Johannesburg lawyer who will take the case free of charge.

## **BOOK 2**

### **CHAPTERS 18 and 19**

#### **Context**

Chapter 18 is more or less a repetition of Chapter 1 in that it has little relation to the plot and describes the landscape around Kumalo's home village of Ndotsheni. However, the perspective is different as it is taken from the home of James Jarvis, which occupies a high place overlooking the valley.

Jarvis is a simple man, but he is concerned by the conditions endured by the natives who live below him. Like Stephen Kumalo, he has a deep-seated love of the land and is concerned at its slow degeneration. His home means everything to him. It has been in his family for generations and he has many happy memories of the area.

It is only after the death of his son that he appreciates fully the work he did in trying to bring justice for all the people of Johannesburg. He is amazed that his son was prepared to sacrifice everything in the pursuit of helping other less fortunate people.

This Chapter also gives a flashback to when Jarvis hears the news of the death of his son. We learn that Mrs. Jarvis is not keeping in good health, but arrangements are made for the couple to be flown to Johannesburg.

In Chapter 19 the story of the flashback continues and deals with the coming to terms with the bad news by the Jarvis's. During this time, they are accompanied by the Harrison's, father and son, the father, John, being Mrs. Jarvis' brother. They are an odd pairing and represent two differing views of the racial situation. The father has the traditional colonial view, regarding the black community as servants to the whites, whereas the son has a more liberal outlook and sees that South Africa's future lies in the integration of blacks and whites.

## **BOOK 2**

### **CHAPTERS 18 and 19**

#### **Interpretation**

These Chapters provide us with a character analysis of James Jarvis. In many ways he is very similar to Stephen Kumalo. They share the same concerns regarding the land and its use, and are conscious of the greater problems facing South Africa, but have not taken any action to face these problems and help solve them.

We suspect that like Stephen, James will also go through a period of enlightenment as he deals with the tragedy of his son's murder.

Paton makes the point that there are far too many passive people on both sides of the divide that appreciate the problems but are not willing to stand up and be counted.

The introduction of John Harrison is Paton's attempt to ridicule the old stance taken by so many of the older generation of whites in South Africa. They still regard the situation of South Africa as a white colonial country for which the blacks merely act as the workforce to support the white society. They wish to prolong the old days of Empire and keep the black community under firm control. Although he admires the work done by Arthur Jarvis, he considers that he was a dreamer and not practical like himself. It is clear that his son recognizes the absurdity of this standpoint and his views are far more liberal and realistic.

Paton has now formed three father/son relationships in the novel. All are different, but all have similarities as well. The main ingredient of all three relationships is the element of communication. So far as the Harrison's are concerned, father has clearly communicated his views to his son, but the son has the wit to see that the father's standpoint is incorrect and he has acted accordingly. James Jarvis' influence on his son has clearly been good, and perhaps out of the three relationships, they enjoyed the best communication, but unlike the father, the son has done more than passively oppose the situation in Johannesburg, as he has acted positively to resolve the situation. So far as Stephen and Absalom are concerned, the relationship is similar to the Harrison's. Absalom was unable to share his father's desire to hold on to the old tribal ways and rebelled by going to the attractions of Johannesburg. In doing so he gave up the morals given to him by his father and due to immaturity, took the path of evil, which led to the murder of Arthur Jarvis.

## **CHAPTERS 20 and 21**

### **Context**

At his son's home James Jarvis looks at his son's work and the papers he has left.

There are many books, most of which deal with the same problems, ranging from works concerning Abraham Lincoln's reforms to other papers dealing with racial issues throughout the world.

He is particularly interested in his son's involvement with the Claremont African Boys' Club and he looks through the Minutes of the Meetings.

Chapter 20 contains a long extract from Arthur's personal writings, which has a great impact on James. "It is not permissible to mine any gold, or manufacture any produce, or cultivate any land, if such mining and manufacture and cultivation depend for their success on a policy of keeping labor poor. It is not permissible to add to one's possessions if these things can only be done at the cost of other men."

Chapter 21 deals with the funeral service and the Jarvis's are overwhelmed at the attendance by all races. At the end of the Service the grieving parents were full of pride for their son, and in some ways they were saddened that they did not fully realize their son's influence. After the service was over the Jarvis's returned to the Harrison's' house. The father continued to blame the natives for all the ills that afflicted South Africa. James tried to be respectful to his host, but he did not agree with Harrison's viewpoint.

The next day, Jarvis again read his son's papers, particularly the last paragraph, which was unfinished and probably represented his son's last thoughts. "The truth is that our civilization is not Christian; it is a tragic compound of great ideal and fearful practice, of high assurance and desperate anxiety, of loving charity and fearful clutching of possessions." Jarvis was greatly moved by his son's thoughts. Again his mind wandered to the work of Abraham Lincoln, and he read from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address as President.

## **CHAPTERS 20 and 21**

### **Interpretation**

James Jarvis is traveling a very similar road to that of Stephen Kumalo. He is on a steep learning curve, realizing the impact that his son had on the Johannesburg community.

At the funeral, they feel the great admiration felt by all sections of society for their son. Even the Police authorities regarded him with respect.

Arthur's written work provides James with a fresh insight into the native community, realizing that all that separates the two races is education.

Ironically, it is James' own poor understanding of the black community that comes as a shock, for in fact the son through his words is educating the father.

James is also intrigued by his son's collection of books, many dealing with the life and reforms of Abraham Lincoln and the emancipation of the Negroes in America. His son also had a large collection of Shakespeare's plays. What James finds difficult to come to terms with is why his son had to die. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to it.

Paton deliberately contrasts the views of Arthur Jarvis with Mr. Harrison, Senior. He is one of the old schools of thought and the standpoint he takes is one of the main stumbling blocks against racial integration.

Paton is at pains to show the parallels between Arthur Jarvis and Abraham Lincoln.

## **CHAPTERS 22 to 25**

### **Context**

These Chapters deal with the trial of Absalom Kumalo.

The proceedings are punctuated by Chapter 23, which deals with the gold rush at Odendaalsrust in the Orange Free State.

There is no doubt that Absalom is guilty of the crime. What Carmichael has to do is plead for mitigation. Of course Kumalo recognizes Jarvis, but Jarvis does not realize that it is Kumalo's son, Absalom, that killed Arthur. We learn of Kumalo's and Jarvis' reactions to the crime as the evidence is produced.

Towards the end of this section, Stephen and James meet. They are both grieving and Jarvis recognizes the suffering of Stephen, but does not yet know that he is related to Absalom. Jarvis assists Kumalo at the Court and this is a departure from his previous behavior. His son's words are having an effect on James' relationship with the black natives. Kumalo advises James that he is Absalom's father, but James shows no anger. Kumalo says that he admired James' son, which moves the father.

## **CHAPTERS 22 to 25**

### **Interpretation**

Paton brings drama into the Trial scene, which starts with a general description of the Court so that the reader has a clear picture of the courtroom. He makes it clear from the outset that the only result of the Trial can be the confirmation of Absalom's guilt. What has to be resolved is the sentence, which would normally be death by hanging.

Kumalo towards the end of Chapter 22 recognizes James Jarvis, and he feels afraid in the presence of this man whose son was killed by Absalom.

Because of the prominence of Arthur Jarvis, the whole of Johannesburg is taking an interest in the Trial for different reasons. The position of the Church is clear, and they are seeking compassion from the Court and use the Trial as a vehicle for underlining the poor position held by the black community in the city. It is not just the tragedy of one young man, but it is a comment on the whole South African regime, and it must be the South African Government that takes responsibility for this situation. If Absalom is sentenced to death, he is sentenced by the Government and not the South African people.

Although we do not know the situation in the other South African cities, Paton makes it clear that perhaps Johannesburg is the worst place in South Africa in which to be a native. He suggests this in the line, "No second Johannesburg is needed upon the earth. One is enough." This is underpinned by Arthur Jarvis' manuscript, which is clearly aimed specifically at Johannesburg, but also applies to the whole country.

James has to come to terms with the fact that he too is part of the problem, and his lack of action has failed his son and his country. At first he is angry at the thought that he failed his son, but he is determined to make amends and his feelings towards the black community become more caring, and this is illustrated in his actions towards Stephen Kumalo. James intuitively recognizes Stephen's suffering and offers him comfort, and when he reveals his relationship to Absalom, Jarvis responds positively.

Chapter 23 deals with the gold rush and the prospect that another Johannesburg will arise in the Orange Free State, as a result. It will be another sponge to suck out the men from the countryside into the mines, toiling for meager pay, destroying the tribal communities of the countryside, leaving wives and mothers to fend for themselves from a land that will produce less and less sustenance; all this to line the pockets of the white mine owners. These mines will be constructed on tribal land. What will the white people say? "But it is wonderful, South Africa is wonderful. We shall hold up our heads the higher when we go abroad, and people say, Ah, but you are rich in South Africa."

The success of the mines cannot be achieved unless the uneducated black natives are duped into coming to the mines and working at subsistence level. They are persuaded that the grass is greener on the other side of the hill, but once they have made the move to the mine, they cannot return. They are in a poverty trap. The Government should be investing in the land so that it can support the people that live on it rather than exploiting the male population in order to maximize the profits from the extraction of gold.

## **CHAPTER 26**

### **Context**

"The great bull voice is speaking there in the square. There are many policemen there, both black and white; it gives one no doubt a sense of power to see them there, and to be speaking to so many people, for the great bull voice growls and rises and falls."

John Kumalo considers himself to be an important orator, but what he says is corrupt. Unlike Arthur Jarvis he will not risk anything to pursue his cause. He views his public speaking as a means for obtaining money. He is regarded with contempt by Dubula and Tomlinson who wish they had his oratory skills in order to give impetus to their genuine cause to improve the conditions of the black people in Johannesburg.

The crowd is caught up in John's speech except those that have heard it before. He is against the increases in fares for the buses because if the poor have to pay more to travel to work, they'll have less money to spend with him. It is clear that John wishes to take on the role of Chief for these people, and he relishes the notoriety and power that he gets from this public speaking.

The Police are concerned about John because he has the ability to whip the crowd up into frenzy, but then he pulls back. If there was not a Police presence, the situation could become dangerous.

A strike occurs in the mines and the fear is that it will spread to the whole of South African industry, bringing about chaos and civil disorder. However the strike does not last long and is confined to the mines alone. The worst trouble was at Driefontein where three black miners were killed.

During this time, the Annual Meeting of the Johannesburg Diocese was held and some of the Ministers suggested that the African Mineworkers Union should be recognised so that the plight of African miners could be addressed. A large proportion of the miners were illiterate and their exploitation was unparalleled.

## **CHAPTER 26**

### **Interpretation**

The main purpose of this Chapter is to provide a backdrop to the main plot, and give the reader some indication as to the lifestyle of the poor native population of Johannesburg.

We see that John Kumalo walks a fine line between the Police authorities and being the self-appointed Chief of the black society. He has to inspire "his people", but keep on the right side of the law. Msimangu suggests that it is a mixed blessing that John is corrupt because if he truly believed in bringing justice to the black population, he could quite easily incite them to rebel against the authorities, which would cause a bloodbath. John's main aim is to bolster his own standing in the black community and no doubt would co-operate with the authorities if they made it worth his while.

The industrial unrest merely provides the white community with more insecurity and apprehension for the future.

## **CHAPTERS 27 TO 29**

### **Context**

There is friction between Mrs. Lithebe and Gertrude as the latter is starting to miss her former life and the freedom it gave her.

The case against Absalom is nearing completion, but against the proceedings is the fact that another similar crime has been committed, where a European householder has been shot dead by a native housebreaker, and this may have a direct effect on the sentence to be imposed on Absalom. The community of the Mission House is now apprehensive about the sentence that Absalom will receive, although they recognize that the Judge is well-respected. He may be under pressure from the authorities to impose the maximum sentence.

Chapter 28 provides details of the Judge's final statement when the case is reviewed in detail. The outcome was never in dispute, and Absalom is found guilty of the crime of murder. The Judge says, "On what grounds, can this Court make any recommendation to mercy? I have given this long and serious thought, and I cannot find any extenuating circumstances." The Judge asks Absalom if he has anything to say before sentence is passed on him. Absalom says, "I killed this man, but I did not mean to kill him, only I was afraid." The Judge passes out the death sentence on Absalom. Some of the members of the public start wailing at this news.

Before the sentence is carried out, arrangements are made for Absalom's marriage. Father Vincent conducts the ceremony in the prison, which is attended by Kumalo, Gertrude and Msimangu.

Amidst the grief of the impending execution of Absalom, Kumalo is pleased that he has married the girl, and he tells him that he will care for the child as if it were his own.

He tells his son that he will be returning home to Ndotsheni in order to provide support to his mother.

Absalom says that if his child is a boy he should be named Peter.

As they leave the prison, Absalom's wife says to Kumalo, "Am I now your daughter?" Kumalo confirms that she is.

Kumalo then goes to his brother's carpenter's shop to say farewell, and John admires his brother for taking Gertrude and her child, and Absalom's wife back with him to Ndotsheni. Kumalo is still bitter towards his brother because John's son betrayed Absalom. He tries to warn John that his quest for power will only further corrupt him, and Kumalo gets some self-satisfaction from the fact that he is able to disconcert his brother and make him feel less secure.

Before Kumalo departs for the countryside, a social gathering is organized at Mrs. Lithebe's house. It is revealed that Msimangu intends to enter a Monastery, which is something of a surprise. Kumalo reminds them that they will all have to rise early in the morning in order to catch the train.

Next day, Gertrude has gone; leaving her little boy and the new clothes that Kumalo had bought for her.



## **CHAPTERS 27 TO 29**

### **Interpretation**

It is clear that the second murder of a white citizen by a burglar taints Absalom's trial. If this had been an isolated crime, then perhaps the Court may have been moved towards clemency, but the worry is that this type of crime will escalate unless there is a suitable deterrent. Many of the black community were prepared for the worst, but even so, when the death sentence was announced it was still a shock.

Paton makes the point that the road to total integration in South Africa is a long one, but slowly and surely, bit-by-bit, the segregation of the races will be eroded. This is symbolized by the fact that the young white man from the Reformatory breaks the longstanding tradition and sits in the black side of the Court. He also visibly helps Stephen Kumalo when he is about to collapse after the sentence is given.

Out of this tragedy comes the ray of hope through the marriage of Absalom and his young pregnant girlfriend. She is now genuinely delighted at being part of Stephen Kumalo's family. It is probably the first real family she has had, and certainly the prospect is that her life can now improve.

Kumalo feels the need to return to his wife as soon as possible in order to comfort her, but also to escape from Johannesburg, which has brought him so much grief and finally, to move his newfound family away from the influences of the sinful city. Before he makes the journey, however, he feels he needs to warn his brother John about the dangers he will face if he continues his corrupt way of life. However, when he sees his brother the sense of betrayal returns to him and he cannot resist telling him a small lie in order to frighten him.

The reader might find it strange that Msimangu has decided to enter a Monastery as it appears like a step back from the field of struggle. Apparently, he is the first black man to take such a step, and Stephen Kumalo benefits from the move as Msimangu gives him his savings account.

You will recall that Kumalo's quest in coming to Johannesburg was to reunite his immediate family. With Gertrude's disappearance this has now failed. His son will be executed. His sister and brother will stay on in Johannesburg, and both their fates are in doubt. However, he is not returning home alone. He has now formed a new extended family with Gertrude's son, a new daughter-in-law and unborn grandchild.

Again we have a symbolic link to the Bible in that Absalom wishes to name his unborn son, Peter after Jesus' disciple Peter the rock. The hope is that Kumalo will be able to establish a new community based on the lives of these young people.

## **BOOK 3**

### **CHAPTERS 30 to 36**

#### **Context**

Kumalo is reunited with his wife. She needs to have confirmation from Kumalo that their son is to die.

Kumalo still hopes for mercy, but this is extremely unlikely. He explains to his wife Gertrude's absence, but introduces instead their new daughter. Kumalo's wife embraces her new daughter and the small boy, and tells the boy that he is her new child. The young girl bursts into tears at being shown such kindness.

On the way back to their home, there is a sudden break in the drought and they have to run for cover. They have been praying long and hard for the rains to come. Kumalo is uplifted by his return for although the community has been living on the edge of survival due to the drought; they are far more united than those he met in the impersonal city of Johannesburg.

Kumalo's followers are well aware of the suffering he and his family have gone through, for news travels fast in this small community, but he has gained much respect from them and they visibly show this to him.

He also has fresh enthusiasm in his work, being inspired by the sermons of Msimangu. He resolves not to passively accept the problems faced by his community, and decides to go to the Chief, even though this may be a futile gesture, as the Chief has been reduced to a mere figurehead, but at least he is doing all that he can do. He also goes to the school and meets with the Head Master, but the Head Master advises Kumalo that it is difficult to improve the situation in the school because it is all down to economics.

Kumalo is determined to bring about an improvement to his village, but all he meets is apathy and obstacles. He realizes that improvement can only come through the power of God, and he prays long and hard for the village of Ndotsheni.

He then had a surprise meeting with a small white boy on a horse, who had ridden into the village seeking Kumalo. The young boy attends St. Mark's School in Johannesburg and Kumalo tells him that his Church is called St. Mark's. The boy wishes to learn Zulu. The boy is Arthur Jarvis' son. Kumalo tells him that the Zulu language is easy to learn and he will soon pick it up. The pair has a long conversation, a mixture of English and Zulu, and the boy confirms that he will visit again so that Kumalo can speak more Zulu to him.

That night while they were eating their meal, a car came to the Kumalo's house with cans of milk for the children who are not yet at school. The man who brought the milk said that if the cans are cleaned and returned here, he will bring milk every day. Kumalo is dumbfounded at this act of kindness.

Kumalo receives four letters from Johannesburg - one is from Absalom to his wife, one is from Absalom to his parents, one is from Msimangu, and the last is from Mr. Carmichael. The letter from Carmichael, the lawyer, explained that there would be no mercy, and the date for the execution had been set.

In Absalom's letter to his parents he reveals that he is aware of his fate and that he will not see them or his home village again. He is being cared for by a black Priest who is preparing Absalom for what lies ahead.

The date for Absalom's execution approaches, and Kumalo decides to meditate, and walks out of the valley onto the hills. There he meets James Jarvis, and Kumalo offers his condolences to James on the recent death of his wife. Jarvis is at pains to reassure Kumalo that her death was not related to the murder of her son, but that she had been ill for some time.

Ever since his son's death, Jarvis has felt a greater sympathy for the black community. Jarvis would like to provide Kumalo and the village with a new Church.

There is still much concern over the condition of the land although the recent rains have helped. Perhaps Kumalo's prayers are bearing fruit because a surveyor comes to review the condition of the land and to seek ways to improve it. It is decided that a dam should be built on Jarvis' land, and this will help the irrigation of the valley.

Kumalo mourns for his son and the fact that he turned his back on his family and ended up in bad company, which had led to the crime against the Jarvis' family.

The two men become closer because of their shared grief, and although they feel love for one another, there is still an invisible barrier between them.

The last Chapter of the book reverts to the format of the first Chapter and provides a hope for the future of Ndotsheni and South Africa as a whole.

"Ndotsheni is still in darkness, but the light will come there also. For it is the dawn that has come, and 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."

### **BOOK 3**

#### **CHAPTERS 30 to 36**

##### **Interpretation**

The end of the drought in the valley of Umzimkulu symbolizes not only the renewal of the land, but also the renewal of Kumalo's spirit. Changed and inspired by his visit to Johannesburg, he endeavors to try and change the plight of the people of his village. He may not be successful, but he decides that continued passive acceptance is not the way forward. Initially he is met by obstacle after obstacle with his visits to the Chief and the Head Master, but the ingredients are there for their lives to improve because the people have a sense of community and spirit that is lacking in the city that he has come from.

Respect for Kumalo has increased through the suffering he has endured and so he is in a position to inspire his flock, he being inspired by Msimangu who quietly worked for the good of humanity and was able to bring about small, but permanent changes to people's lives.

Kumalo can now go to the Chief and urge him to act because he has a better insight into how the tribal system has failed the people. His experiences in the city have enabled him to be more courageous and to question the Chief's word. By putting pressure on the Chief, he might be able to make him react. He hopes to have better luck with the Head Master, but he too explains that his hands are tied.

Kumalo has no alternative but to pray harder for his people, and coincidentally or not, James Jarvis who overlooks the valley has decided to continue his son's work and give assistance to the black community. He started this almost immediately by making a large donation to the African Boys' Club, and now he provides milk for the village children. He is determined that his son's life's work will not have been in vain. He realizes that the future of South Africa is in the hands of the young, and so he encourages his grandson to learn Zulu in the hope that he will also have a better understanding of the natives' problems, as he grows older.

Another seemingly unrelated incident occurs when a surveyor arrives in the valley to assess the use of the land. Then Jarvis, whilst riding in the village, is caught in a downpour and has to take refuge in the Church. He notices that the roof is leaking badly and promises to build a new Church for the village. It transpires that Jarvis has provided the valley with the surveyor who will assess the agricultural potential of the valley, the aim being for the land to be more productive. Jarvis is not interested in providing the people with charity, but putting them in the position that they can support themselves.

Paton clearly shows that the material side of people's lives can be easily addressed so that all the people can have a life above a mere subsistence level. The real problem that South Africa faces is the integration

of all the races, and this is a far more difficult challenge. He stresses the importance that the white community needs to understand their black neighbors. This is symbolized through Jarvis' grandson wanting to learn Zulu.

Although there are numerous instances of white people being caring and giving to black people, there is still a barrier between the races. This is illustrated by the relationship between Jarvis and Kumalo in the final Chapters of the book. When Mrs. Jarvis dies, custom prevents Kumalo from visiting Jarvis, and he has to send a letter of condolence. When the pair meets on the mountainside, both mourning for their sons, something holds them back from fully opening their hearts to one another. Unless these barriers are broken down, then Msimangu's prophecy, who you will recall is Paton's mouthpiece, will come to fruition. He prophesied that by the time the whites realize that they must treat the blacks with justice and decency; their patience will have worn away and will have been replaced by hate.

At the end, Kumalo realizes that the solution to South Africa's problems is through true Christian love for one another.

It is important for the reader to realize that this book was written during a dark period of South Africa's history, but despite this Paton provides a ray of hope for the future.

## **THEMES**

### **FEAR and RACE**

Throughout the novel, there is a thread of fear running through the storyline and this is also emphasized in the Chapters and passages that provide a background to the story.

Starting in the village of Ndotsheni we note that the people live in fear of starvation. The land is unable to sustain the population and provide food. The society is practically devoid of men as they have traveled to the city of Johannesburg or the gold mines to obtain work. Those left behind are fearful as to the well-being of their loved ones.

As Kumalo travels to Johannesburg, he is fearful of what awaits him. He finds the city confusing and unsettling, and he dreads what he will find out about his family.

The natives living in the city have left one fear and now face another. They have the daily task of trying to earn enough money to feed them and there is always the threat that they will lose their jobs. They are frightened to speak out against the Government's oppression, for this would lead to violence. Many of the black population resort to a life of crime in order to try and improve their social position. Kumalo's son embarks on this path and through fear, murders Arthur Jarvis. We note that whilst in the Reformatory, he was a model inmate, probably because within the walls he was protected from the fear that exists in the city streets.

The white population is also fearful of their situation. They have obtained their position through violence and wars, amongst themselves and against the Zulu nation. They are in a precarious position because the black population far outnumbers them. Many realize that oppression is not the answer to South Africa's long-term problems, and eventually integration must happen. However, they too are fearful of the authorities and cannot rebel against the Government by contravening the laws and assisting the black population.

It should be noted that the author of this book was in conflict with the authorities and was charged with treason.

Paton is at pains to emphasize that the actions taken by the characters in this book are often driven by fear. Paton's fear was that the patience shown by the black population towards their white overlords waiting for change would be replaced by hatred of the whites.

## **CHARACTER EVOLUTION**

The problems facing South Africa are symbolized by groups of characters in the plot and their abilities to change. For South Africa to evolve and become part of the modern world it needs to change from the position it was in after the Second World War.

Against this change stood the Nationalist Party symbolized through the character of Harrison, Senior. He is portrayed as one of the old school, a colonist and ruler of the uneducated black race. He does not see them as proud Zulus, but as ignorant natives only fit to serve the Imperial regime.

At the other end of the scale, we have the tribal system ruled by the Zulu Chiefs. The Chief in the Umzimkulu Valley is also incapable of change. He is but a figurehead who has watched the tribal system disintegrate.

The characters that symbolize the changing face of South Africa are Stephen Kumalo and James Jarvis. The events they witness steel them to adapt and change where previously their view was to passively accept the situation. Jarvis is inspired by his son's work to bring justice to all the peoples of Johannesburg. It is only after his son's death that he realizes the esteem he was held in by all races.

When Stephen Kumalo travels to Johannesburg it is to try and recreate the tribal system by bringing together his family once more. He quickly realizes that this is not possible for he loses all three members of his family who cannot make the transition back to the way things were. Inspired by the words and work of Msimangu, Kumalo is rejuvenated and although he does not know how he will solve the problems of his village, he will try harder to do so when he returns. He returns home with a new family who are the new hope for the future.

The plight of the village is alleviated by Kumalo's determination and co-operation with James Jarvis, and the conditions of his people improve steadily. Paton's point here is that progress can only be made by bringing about change in systems and in people, and with blacks and whites working together for a common goal, not leading separate existences.

## **CONCLUSION**

Politically the situation worsened in South Africa after this book was published. The introduction of apartheid legalized racial segregation, which resulted in racial inequality from 1949 right through until 1990. In 1994 the transition to a non-racial democratic society was complete, which brought about the African National Congress obtaining power. The Congress had originally been formed in 1912 and their aim has always been to secure racial equality and full political rights for non-whites. Their leaders Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu were imprisoned for their outspoken views in 1964. The both served long sentences. Nelson Mandela became South Africa's first post-apartheid President.

Although this vast country still faces many problems, they do so as a united democratic people and although friction is still evident between the races, by and large, Paton's fear that the blacks would hate the whites has not transpired.

## **QUESTIONS for STUDY**

Provide details where fear has governed the decisions made by the characters in the book.

What are the social problems raised in this book?

'Cry, the Beloved Country' can be regarded as a social protest novel, and usually such works have a socialist or communist flavour to them. This book is different and is often referred to as a 'Christian novel'. Please expand.

Paton provides a study of human relationships between the characters of this book, e.g. Kumalo and Absalom

Kumalo and John

James and Arthur Jarvis, and

Kumalo and James Jarvis

Please expand on one or more of these.

Paton is deliberate in choosing names for his characters. What significance do they have?