

MY GREAT DISCOVERY

ALAN PATON

After much exploratory
Work in my laboratory
I made an epoch-making
Breath-taking
Discovery.

Can you not picture me?
Can you not see me there,
Wild eyes, disordered hair,
With fanatical persistence
And white-robed assistants
In masks,
And flasks
Smoking, choking
Everywhere?

I cannot give to such as you
The reasoning which led me to
This epoch-making
Breath-taking
Discovery.

Well this discovery
Was simple as could be
Five straight injections
Position, lumbar
In colour, umber
Taste, very like cucumber
Effect, inducing slumber
And if I may remind you
Five in number—
These five injections could erase
In just as many days
The pigmentation
From any nation.

I sat astounded
Completely dumbfounded
By the epoch-making
Breath-taking
Discovery.
Being a scientist, delighted
Being South African, affrighted
In Great Britain, knighted.
I seized the telephone
And in a voice unlike my own
(Not through dissembling
But through trembling)
Government, I said
The girl said, what division?
I said, no divisions any more.
She said, I mean what section?
I said, no sections any more.
She said, I'll report you,
(Or deport you,
I can't quite say
I'm not au fait
With recent legislation)
I said, you go ahead
Or I shall plunge the nation
Into a conflagration.

I know that shocked her
She said, you need the Doctor
I said, Yes get the Doctor
And all the Cabinet,
For I can change the pigmentation
Of any nation.
To cut the story short
She gave a kind of snort
And got the real big Boss
Who said, of coss, of coss,
Come up at once.

It is no kind of pret
To face a Cabinet
They were astounded
And dumbfounded.

One said, Good Lord
And hummed and hawed
And one was suave
Just like the papers say.
And one was gay
And said this is the day
For if the pigmentation
Of any nation
Can suffer alteration
Why the whole fact of race
Takes on another face.
But another Minister
Looking quite sinister
Just like the papers say
Said this suggestion
Requires digestion
Let's meet another day.

And so again I met
The Cabinet
And this same Minister
Still looking sinister
Said, does this alteration
Of the pigmentation
Of any nation,
Just work from black to white
Or do you think it might
Change also white to black?
And I replied
All full of pride
The recipe can be supplied
For any shade
In beige or jade
In snow or jet
Or violet.

Then sir, he said, I here submit
A list of those to be
Changed with this recipe.
He pushed the list across
To the big Boss.
My eyes are fine

A shiver went right down my spine
The leading name was mine.

I reached into my pocket
And pressed the radar switch
That sent the radar rocket
Which
Blew up the laboratory
And all work exploratory
Plus my assistants
Whom at this distance
I spared the degradation
The gross humiliation
Of working for a caitiff
Who had gone naitiff.