

employer and she has to work with disagreeable, stupid, but much better paid and more highly privileged white colleagues. Her reactions to their mindless, obtuse and totally insensitive prejudices contain surprises—even revelations—for most white South African readers. Her tone is very often humorous: sometimes wry, but sometimes extraordinarily tolerant; but the sense of an uncompromising personal pride is convincingly conveyed.

The personal humiliations are only some of the several painful aspects of her position. She is anxious to find satisfaction and fulfilment in her job; but the 'shark' H-P firm she works for virtually exists by exploiting her own people. She finds herself having to ask customers for their passes; or writing threatening letters to people whom she knows are simply too poor to pay.

Her own conflicts, her sense of helpless frustration, are expressed as it were episodically, pervading the daily inconclusiveness, irritations, temptations and fatigues of the

job, with only occasional emotional outbursts (like a passionate lament for the destruction of Sophiatown). The pattern of inconclusiveness—the climaxes evaded, the explosions unexpectedly erupting, the feared threats and hoped-for promises coming to nothing—add to the convincing texture and feeling of daily life: unpatterned, full of mild surprises, usually not leading anywhere but continually having to be lived through.

However, as a result of this same formlessness, the genuine climax of action and attitude at the end of the book, though not unexpected, does not appear inevitable; and so some of its moving and significant potential is lost.

The main value of the book, in fact, seems to lie in those aspects of it which are least like a novel and most like a diary or detailed autobiography: the accurate insights into, and dispassionate though vivid and humorous communication of complex everyday experiences.□

# ACHIEF IS A CHIEF BY THE PEOPLE

Review by Alan Paton

This book is the life of Mr Stimela Jason Jingoos of Lesotho. It is also an account of the Society into which he was born and is still living in, at the age of 80. It treats in particular of the institution of chieftainship, and tells how first the British Government, and then the independent Lesotho Government, have changed and are changing the institution Mr Jingoos is a Christian, but believes firmly in the immortality of the ancestors, who can do both harm and good, and must be interceded with. It gives also a description of the countryside, with names both of people and places, of rivers and hills and mountains.

These accounts are recorded and the book compiled by John and Cassandra Perry of Rhodes University, Grahamstown. They do not wish to be called editors. Their unobtrusive contribution is outstanding, and has helped to make a fascinating book.

Mr Jingoos himself is a superb story-teller, indeed a teller of many stories, of tribal fights, of celebrated cases in the tribal courts, of herd-boy rivalries. He brings his characters to life, even though a white mind might not always understand them fully. His whole life was not spent in Lesotho. In 1917, he joined the army and went to France. The loyalty of the

Basotho to the British Royal House can only be regarded with wonder. He spent a great slice of his life, from 1927 to 1937, in the service of Clements Kadalie and the I.C.U., the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of South Africa. At times the work required considerable courage. It meant the challenging of white authority, the employers, the police, and the courts. In 1937 he returned to Lesotho, and now his life became linked with a Chieftainship, the Makhabane line of Mats'ekheng.

Mr Jingoos was the contemporary and close friend of Chief Boshokane, Chief Mitchell's first son. They grew up together, and Mr Jingoos was to see the dark side of chieftainship, and the intrigue and violence that are bound up with the whole matter of succession. Chief Mitchell's second son was Nkuebe. Chieftainess Ma Loela, the grandmother of these two boys, was determined that Nkuebe should succeed his father, because Boshokane's mother was a commoner. Boshokane and Nkuebe were sent to live with their grandmother, but she treated the elder boy so scurvily that he left her, and returned to his paternal home. In due course his father, Chief Mitchell, named Boshokane as his successor, and in due course Boshokane succeeded his father. He called Mr Jingoos to be his clerk and adviser, and put him in charge of his son and heir, the boy Makhabane.

Makhabane was still a boy at school when Chief Boshokane died, and so his mother, Ma Makhabane, became the regent. It was soon clear that Ma Makhabane had no desire to relinquish the regency. Nkuebe could not get her to name a date. Whenever he went to see her, she was ill, or she had to go elsewhere urgently. She demanded that her son should marry before he succeeded, and she demanded that he should marry a girl of her choice. When he decided to choose his own wife, she drove back the dowry cattle. It seemed that power was driving her mad.

And indeed it was so. She decided on a terrible course. She, aided by accomplices, decided that a man named Mocheseloa must be drugged, and that parts of his living body, his lips, his tongue, his throat, must be cut out, so that those taking them for medicine might have the gift of speech and power and honour. Mr Jingoos writes "The other details of how Mocheseloa was cut I do not want to talk about. He was related to me, and beloved of everyone, especially of the Chieftainship and of his uncle, Pholo." The story is made more terrible by the knowledge that it was Pholo who cut out his nephew's tongue. While Mzimukulu was cutting flesh for the Chieftainess, Ma Makhabane prayed: "Oh mercy, Mother Maria, for you know I am committing a sin, but I am doing this because I want to be known. I pray to Thy Holy name, that You do not count this as a sin, because I want to keep the Chieftainship of Mats'ekheng . . ." The author relates this terrible story without dramatic devices, and indeed it needs none.

For this crime fifteen were accused. Two were discharged. Eleven were sentenced to terms ranging from 7 to 15 years. The Chieftainess and a man Rachakane were hanged.

The story does not end there. There were in fact too many chiefs, and the British Government got the Paramount Chief to reduce the numbers, an agreement which weakened the traditional nature of the chieftainship, and the long tradition that a chief is a chief by the people, and not by the grace of any government or any other chief. This weakening of the

chieftainship again had terrible consequences in the 'Forties. In spite of the execution of the Chieftainess and Rachakane, others turned to ritual murder and the use of human flesh for magic purposes to retain their power. Parents would not allow their children to go out after dark. People began to fear their chiefs. Many were hanged, including two of the most senior chiefs, Bereng Griffith and Gabashane Masopha.

The ritual murders further weakened the Chieftainship. Mr Jingoos writes: "The chiefs were not wicked or bad men; they were insecure men, who turned to the supernatural in an attempt to resist losing their rights." One cannot help noting that Mr Jingoos refrains from any outright condemnation of the means employed. His main criticism of ritual murder is not that the murderers regarded human beings—their fellow Basotho, in fact—as means to their ends, and seemed to think they had some right to kill and mutilate them—it was that the murders weakened the Chieftainship, and estranged the common people. The conflict between Christianity and the tribal culture goes deep, and only exceptional people can resolve it. Mr Jingoos is not one of them.

It is not so much the belief in the continuance of the ancestors; many parts of the Christian church have such a belief. Nor is it the practice of seeking the intercession of the ancestors, for the Roman Catholic Church practices something like it. Nor is it the invoking of the help of the supernatural, for Christians do the same. It is rather—in Mr Jingoos—a strange reluctance to question the moral nature of the supernatural powers, and the moral nature of the means employed by humans to gain their favour.

The book has this moral ambiguity, but as a work of literature it is superb. Not only is Mr Jingoos to be congratulated, but so also are John and Cassandra Perry, who saw the possibilities of the story of the nation founded by the great Moshoeshe. I do not know much about the literature of Lesotho, but this book must be a valuable addition. □

## GETTING UP THERE AGAIN

A review of Alan Paton's *Knocking on the Door: Shorter Writings*, selected and edited by Colin Gardner (David Philip, Cape Town, 1975—R9,50)

Reviewed by Tony Voss