

# AFRICANA

Send contributions to *Africana*, P.O. Box 2068, Cape Town. One prize of R1 will be awarded for the best item each month, and two consolation prizes of 50c.

- The Turfloop University College for Africans, now in its third year, is achieving success, says its rector, Dr. E. F. Potgieter. One of the reasons is that "we have among our students that certain intellectual discretion and human superiority which has made remote monasteries in Afghanistan and places like Lambarene world famous."—*Rand Daily Mail* [Benjamin P.]
- The music by Stanley Glaser contributed notably to the evening, and the general vitality of our Coloured community was here shown to advantage. I was sorry to note several native players in the cast. Was it not possible to make this show entirely representative of the Coloured people?—Review of "Mr. Paljas" in *House & Home*. [G.V.]
- "There is only one solution to the problem of the Coloured people: purely and simply, integration into the white community. Linguistic and cultural integration is already accomplished. Economic integration is on its way. Biological integration—practised every day to a slight extent—will neither increase nor diminish when it is legal."—Paul Giniewski in the *Sunday Times*. [Charles B.]
- The "Free Blacks" were descendants of the freed slaves and detribalised Hottentots. Many of them worked as labourers on the farms. A large number lived in Cape Town earning a living as fishermen, vegetable hawkers or casual labourers. The Cape Coloured eventually emerged from this class.—*History for the Cape Senior Certificate and Matriculation*, by C. de K. Fowler & G. J. J. Smit. [A.G.]
- "Everywhere the non-Europeans have taken over what our forefathers pioneered for us. They have been assisted by the pro-Jew-Nigger-Communitic UN."—R. K. Rudman in the *Sunday Times*.
- Blonde, able, matured, genial gentleman, very interesting, offers friendship, help.—Personal column, *Sunday Times*.
- Overseas specialist in removing hair, face, arms, legs. Ladies, gents shoulders. No waxing or needles used. Entirely new methods—Personal column, *Rand Daily Mail*.

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Let me tell  
a story  
now . . . .

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## BESSIE HEAD

I DON'T KNOW WHY this is so but the first thing a person you've just been introduced to will ask you is: "What work do you do?" I don't mean that he or she will ask it bluntly, just like that. They will hedge around a bit but eventually they will get down to the point and drag it out of you. As I say, I don't know why you dare to ask such a personal question but the reason that I do is because each person that I meet is a complete mystery to me. I have to find a quick and superficial way of piecing him together so that I know where I stand. I mean, I don't like to behave like a fool and some people instantly give you the feeling that you are behaving like a fool. I'm specifically referring to a hard case lawyer I once knew. I struggled quite unsuccessfully to explain a delicate matter to him that needed just a bit of understanding and humane feeling and couldn't understand why he kept pulling me to shreds. Only later I learnt that the man's mind worked this way: "Let's consider it on a judicial basis." The poor man had completely identified himself with his work. He was all one-sided. A very dangerous type that because they can bust your ego to bits and you won't know what's happening to you, especially if your enemies are around and watching the terrific beating you are taking from one who knows all the answers.

In a broad sense then I would say a person's character type makes him gravitate to a certain type of work. The fussy-fussy, jumpy sort of woman becomes a typist where she can mess around all day minding other people's businesses. The rather heartless, dominating you-actually-deserve-all-you-get type becomes a social worker. The tough guy with sadistic tendencies becomes a jail warden or a policeman. The dull, drab and toiling type a waitress, shop-girl or nurse. And so on.

I'm sorry but it has taken me quite a long time to get down to what I actually wanted to say. When anyone asked me this question, namely: "What work do you do?" I used to answer: "Oh, I'm a writer". Which is quite a lie because I've hardly written a thing, and I've tried but I know I just wouldn't be able to earn a living by writing. Working people are earning a living. I won't truthfully be a writer until I'm *earning* something from the business.

When they said: "Oh, that's interesting and what have you written?" I would say: "Well . . . I have two unpublished manuscripts. One got lost in the post. The other got lost among the papers and rubble on a publisher's desk." Nobody believed me, of course, and

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funnily enough I was telling the truth. I didn't have the guts to defend myself because I wouldn't have liked them to read what I had written. It was a hotch-potch of under-done ideas, and, monotonous in the extreme. There was always a Coloured man here, an African man there and a White somewhere around the corner. Always the same old pattern. I tried to be poetic but even that didn't help. I just bored myself to death and I assumed that I would bore others too so I shut my mouth pretty quick about what I had written. If I had to write one day I would just like to say *people is people* and not damn White, damn Black. Perhaps if I was a good enough writer I could still write damn White, damn Black and still make people *live*. Make them real. Make you love them, not because of the colour of their skin but because they are important as human beings.

FOR INSTANCE, I WOULD LIKE to write the story about a man who is a packing hand at the railways and lives in one of the tumbling down, leaky houses in District Six. One year for his annual leave he decided to make use of the railway concession and take a free train ride with his wife to Durban. All the neighbours knew about it because they are a popular and sociable couple, as are most people in District Six. No one has much of a private life in District Six. The neighbours make it their business to know all about you and they don't mind what your sins are. In fact, if it comes to the push they'll defend even if the law considers you in the wrong. The only suspicious man in District Six is the man who doesn't show his face and keeps a closed door. We are the real good and jolly neighbours, minding each other's business the way neighbours should. We can't help it because we're all piled up on each other.

Well, to get back to the story. This man and his wife had a crowd of friends tagging along as they went to catch the train to Durban. Ticket and booking all arranged. Bags stacked with food for the journey. Things like roast fowl, fish cakes, meat balls and plenty of sandwiches and some booze. The wife, a huge, adventurous, generous, loud-talking, happy and care-free woman climbed on the train first. The husband remained on the platform with the friends. He was sort of g'lum with a I'm-figuring-this-thing-out look on his face. He always gets that look on his face when he's not too pleased about something. Just as the first warning bell rang he shouted with real terror in his voice: "Ma, get off. Let's go home." And that was that. He didn't even have to explain. Everyone understood. To leave Cape Town and go gallivanting around like some fool in a foreign place like Durban would be an act of the most vile treachery. Cape Town is his home. He was born here. He will die here. Besides, nobody in Durban would understand him. He has a very special kind of language. His very own. He has a special kind of face that is comfortingly reflected in the faces around him. Those faces swear with the exact same nuance that he does. They eat the exact same food. They have the exact same humour. Why go to that fool of a place called Durban? What is there in it for him? To leave Cape Town would be like dying. It would be the destruction of all that he is as a man. He just doesn't have the kind of pretentiousness that makes an Ameri-

can tourist come and gape at the Zulu dances.

Well there it is. I would like to write the story of the man and his wife who never took the train journey, but I can't. When I think of writing any single thing I panic and go dead inside. Perhaps it's because I have my ear too keenly attuned to the political lumberjacks who are busy making capital on human lives. Perhaps I'm just having nightmares. Whatever my manifold disorders are, I hope to get them sorted out pretty soon, because *I've just got to tell a story.* ●

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## The Khoisan People

*Drought spoiled everything;  
shrank bellies of grass;  
game drifted and the plains  
to which the tribe had fled  
powdered, there scabbled no other hunters here and  
the crows hopped leaner.*

*Without water  
these three left their mother by a hillside  
with sufficient thorn for a fire.  
The tribe had served notice on them but  
their mother cursed them as they left.  
She turned the patina of her seamed face  
toward the rock, and mooched about  
within the five yard compass of her  
small recess. She had one more  
night of thirst before she dried out  
into sticks and parchment.*

*The wind sang  
in the kranz, admitting it came from the Kalahari.*

J. R. A. BAILEY

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# TRANSITION

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