

FAUST. Despite the ethics of the thing,
It was worth that one last fling.
(*They go off.*)
MARGARETA. Let other guiltless souls though dead
Take me from this place so dread.
(*Enter figures.*)
FIGURES. We are the spirits of those who died at
Sh-rp-v-ll-, come to help you.

SCENE VIII. HELL

DEVIL. Imps! imps! we've come, we've come,
Where's the anthem, where's the drum?
1ST IMP. No drums for you, O vilest King,
No longer are you just the thing!
2ND IMP. You're expelled so get out, fly
Running dog! celestial spy.
DEVIL. Go I shall, it's your disgrace

If Hell becomes a holy place (*Exit*)
(*Enter Margareta*)
MARGARETA. Faust, we are reunited,
Tis in Hell that wrongs are righted.
1ST IMP. You're free to leave and go your way,
Of course we'll meet again one day.
FAUST. With race and class we both have done
We'll stay on here where there are none.
MARGARETA. Eternity is just a phase,
It's not as long as ninety days.
Though refugees all know quite well
They'll even snatch a man from Hell.
ANNOUNCER. In outer Hell, it's sometimes said,
The Fiend stokes coal to earn his bread.
All believers say it's fine,
'Just the latest party-line.'

The Row at the Crossroads

*Government supporters, dissenters
and the community's guidance*

CARL MAFOKO

GIRLS IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL plied clumsy knives with awkwardness, carving the wood, striving to produce a desired figure out of the thing: say of a bird, a stool or a cooking ladle. One bit the lower lip and the tongue; another squinted the eye and twitched the nose with effort to turn out some presentable figure from the clumsy shape. She moistened a bruised thumb on the brown gums of a tooth gap with concern. Boys hovered over bread and straw with a condescending air, as if they found this feminine occupation of wearing colourful patterns a low, time-wasting affair.

Well, the planners of the curriculum were out to see progress result from this unusual system of transposing the male and female bent for occupation.

On the way home a girl pleaded with a boy to 'please show me how you ever do this thing!' A boy handed the sister a tangle of straw and bead to 'do for me these things of yours, come you!' He pursed lips, with nose and brow raised in contempt. Neither party showed any co-operation. It was as if they found it unconventional to impart one to the other group the secrets of such an innate talent, the special licence of their sex.

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The nagging scenes carried on at home. The girl approached the father and the boy the mother. 'Now don't they say we have to do this nowadays?' The mother sympathised but could not understand why present systems would so work against the grain. And always the father retorted: 'Won't you leave me now with this nonsense of yours, you! Where have you ever seen your kind trained for such work? You're out of the way, eh! Don't you see those are just play things of school?' Perhaps he wanted to say those are recreational activities that form part of the school routine.

The child shuffled to school and felt one rather chosen to hop at a drill course when not doing arithmetic.

THERE HAD BEEN THE SAME naggings when the new African language twist appeared. Parents just would not lend an appreciative ear to the child reciting the new numerals, nor to the beginner lisping and rolling new word forms on the tooth gap. They rather felt offended by the implication that the rich, sombre-language heritage of Africa was being sneered at; that the normal flow of the language was being truncated so that it halted over the tongue with abruptness, the steady, poetic rise and fall, musical cadence and rhetorical crescendo cribbed and orientated to the relatively staccato march of the official language.

And while the parents smarted over these feelings the planners forged ahead and the children were caught up in the plans. They had to struggle between adjusting to the academic flare and maintaining the traditional flow . . . The Bantu Education Department was out to show the world what sort of pioneering research work South Africans could engage in—developing out of the blue a scholar *patois* within the mother tongue.

But the child in Standard VI always found garden or rockery laying a more profitable work, always felt a drill course was a better extramural to cope with.

AND TO THE PARENTS the teacher always cautioned: "If you comment on such things the school will close. Better have this than nothing."

"Aaah . . . well, let them learn . . ." and left a vacant puzzle.

Unknown to all, the official voice hovered in the air, planning, searching to find a way out of the impasse—rejection of Bantu Authorities. Bantu Authorities, trusteeship there . . . all must follow who are in the State boat. Village and location councils, school boards, tribal chiefs . . . all must abide who are in the circle. Not a State within a State; it is absurd . . . all must sail with the Republican ship. And by God you will. By all means, any means, direct or indirect, fair or foul.

IN THE SCHOOL OFFICE the Teacher sat with the principal and another teacher. Also present were the chairman and the secretary of the school committee. The teacher was speaking, stressing a point.

"They have accepted the school board and now they say they don't want the school board. They have accepted Bantu Authorities and now they say they don't want it."

The chairman ventured an explanation: "No, Bantu Authorities they say they have not accepted. Isn't it that they say it operates in trust lands only?"

"How can they not accept it? Do they think they can oppose the law? Cxa, the day the school closes we shall know whom to tackle. Monnyane, Seokga and Thompane. Think they know! Want school, yet oppose government! No, they don't want the school. Want to see it close, for good. No, better alert the village men in time. We shall have to deal with them. Burn their houses."

"Arson?"

"No, it will be in defence of the State."

The principal did not offer comment.

The Teacher, the principal, the chairman, the secretary, were the light, the leaders of their people. And as they sat in the office the four gentlemen rather felt they were a nice, round Four. Felt they were of some consequence; they were the leaders in the community.

Teacher went about in the village issuing cautions, and the Teacher was a social man. Spent his time off duty with the people; enjoyed the finer sentiments of love, human attachment, devotion among the people. He was so much one with the village that he could have drawn a vivid picture of the people's life of struggling if he were endowed with the sense of a historian and exercised it; endowed with the probing talent of a writer. He knew the latest gossip and joined in it readily; knew the daily complaints: 'we are well . . . we only see this, that', trite and made so by the lapse of time. He complained with the people. When it came to objectionable school curricula the Teacher still went about and heard the people voice their objections. He grumbled also but always cared to round up his comments with an uncommitted sentence: "what can we say?" Then at school the Teacher read a circular from The Department which asserted that the new system had been widely and spontaneously accepted by the people. And this he would swallow with a complacent air. No wonder he cries "how can you accept . . . and then denounce . . ." Well, you have to give it to The Department. They know how to approach the people, how to hand them the facts. No travesty, if you are thinking that way!

AT A WEDDING the village councillor sat apart with Seokga while waiting for their share of the drinks.

"You are a Communist S'okga, I'm telling you! You, S'okga and Monnyane; you're Communists. How can you oppose the Government?"

Seokga was trying to explain how the meaning of the word Communism could not apply to him, how it stood in our country mainly to suit the ends of the rulers. He was warning that his friend should be careful what words he used on some people.

"You! Think you know! Never come right here! We shall rule. The Government says you are a Communist if you say such things against the law."

The village councillor, the social man are leaders. Sensible guidance, a mature outlook, responsibility are demanded of them, not only by the people but by the Government as well.

The planning, searching voice was testing all the safety valves, tucking and screwing on all the emergency buttons.

BACK AT SCHOOL, the principal of the lower primary was examining his assistants' scheme books. He shook his head with apprehension at the scheme book of one Mrs. Cholane, an old lady of above sixty teaching the beginners. In the margin he wrote red: "*You are teaching beyond the Syllabus . . .*"

Mrs. Cholane looked at the remark and shook her head also. She had held her post at the school for more than thirty years. All the members of the staff remembered her teaching when they were in the sub-standards. She had initiated children every year, was used to her work, and liked it. She muttered to herself: "Think I don't know what to teach the children!" She went up to the principal and said: "I shall continue to teach the children as I have always done. And I'll do no more and no less." Well, she is not teaching any longer. And now who cares?

The school master shook an unconvinced head. The principal never volunteered any comments. And as to that, let it speak for itself.

All these, the supporters and dissenters, the ignorant and the confused are symbols of some latent force trying to find a foothold in the soil of Africa.

Down at the cross roads the row goes on. One says to the other, your actions are calculated to bring about the ruin of the school. The other says by playing up to The Department, by agreeing to everything without balancing, you do not help The Department. It will blunder and go from bad to worse. The one says you're closing it? The other says it's you. The one says you do not co-operate with The Department. The other says, you will change the normal school into a worthless institution; you change the community into a mock tribe. The one says what will you do if the Government takes measures against you? The other points out, the basis of a democratic government is that it be told its blunders. The one says hoo! and moves away, while the other stammers forth with a desire to tell the facts. But he is left alone. Alone with the wind and a hoarse voice, and it is as if he hears a husky echo in the trees, in the nearby church building.

It goes on like this every day, and you say there will be no strife?