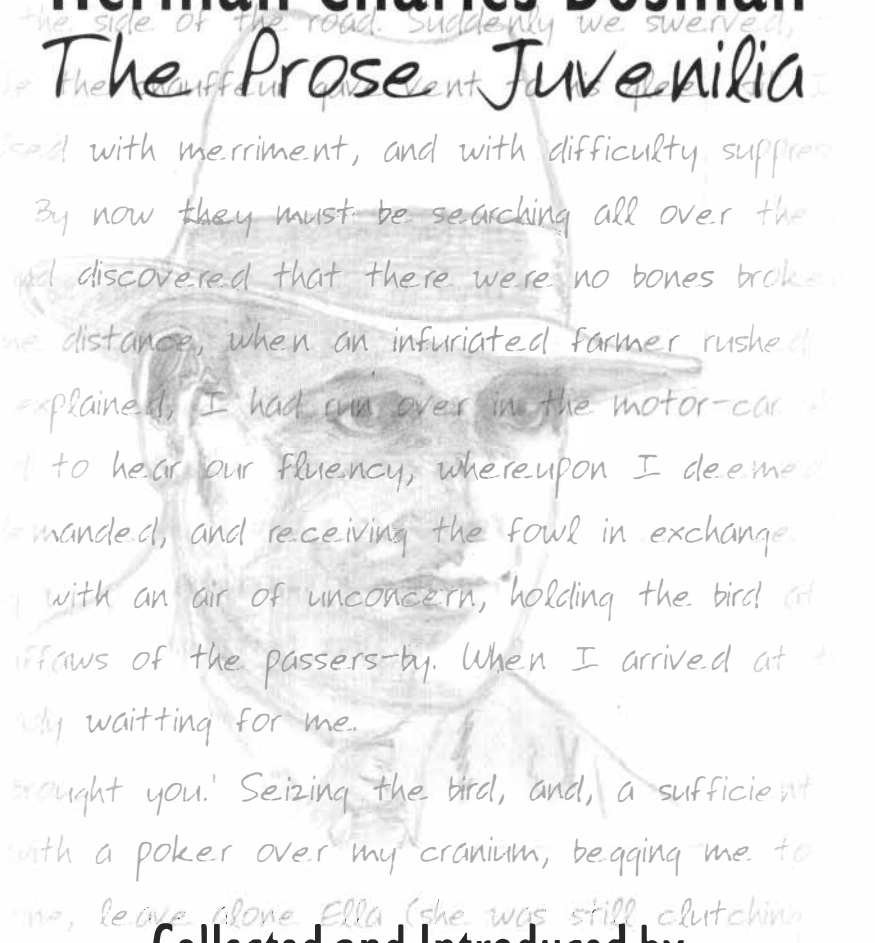
MISCELLANEA SPECIALIA 21

UNISA

Herman Charles Bosman

The Prose Juvenilia



Collected and Introduced by

M C Andersen

University of South Africa, Pretoria

For my family

First edition, first impression

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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

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Introduction

To a great many South Africans, Herman Charles Bosman is a household name. Even among those who have not read his works, a considerable number of people associate the name with a vast collection of short stories about a community of Afrikaners residing in the Marico district of what was once known as the Western Transvaal. More committed admirers of Bosman's works are familiar with the body of essays and articles on diverse subjects, including art and literature, that were produced during a fruitful collaboration with Aegidius Jean Blignaut in their multiple journalistic ventures of the nineteen-thirties. Equally valued as representative of the man's genius is the autobiographical work, *Cold Stone Jug* (1949), which recounts Bosman's experiences in Pretoria Central Prison: reprieved, at the age of twenty-two, from a death-sentence after having shot and killed his stepbrother in 1926, Bosman was ultimately released when he had served a term of some four years. A spell, in 1943, as editor of *The Zoutpansberg Review and Mining Journal* in Pietersberg also prompted two novels: *Jacaranda in the Night* (1947) and the unfinished *Willemsdorp* (1977), which appeared posthumously. All of these works have been published – some repeatedly – in single volumes or in collections, the most significant of which is Lionel Abrahams's *The Collected Works of Herman Charles Bosman*. This substantial edition is a carefully produced selection, however, and some 'uncollected' essays and stories have subsequently been assembled by Bosman's biographer, Valerie Rosenberg, and published for an increasingly appreciative audience.

Some of Bosman's work has not been made available in this way. I am referring to the twenty or so early writings published during his schooldays and while he was at the University of the Witwatersrand. I was made aware of their existence when reading Rosenberg's biography, *Sunflower to the Sun*, and Stephen Gray's book, entitled *Herman Charles Bosman*, in the South African Literature Series.[1] The few items from *The Jeppe High School Magazine* and from *The University of the Witwatersrand Student Magazine: The Umpa*[2] were kindly and promptly supplied on request. A

1 *These early writings are not listed in Shora G. de Saxe's* Herman Charles Bosman: A Bibliography *(1971), nor do they appear in Valerie Dickson's 'A Bibliography of Herman Charles Bosman: The Published Prose, and the Manuscripts at the Humanities Research Center' (1981).*

2 *Prior to 1925, the name of this publication was* The University of the Witwatersrand Student Magazine. *From 1925, the name was enlarged to incorporate the words* The Umpa.

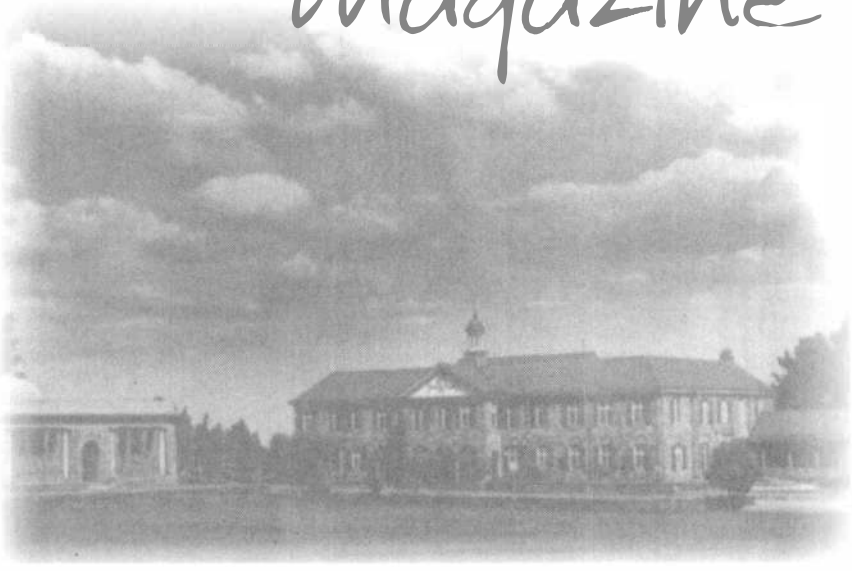
series of tales published in the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* required more perseverance. Gray's detailed Chronology gives the information that, in 1921, Bosman contributed to the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* 'as "Ben Eath" and "Ben Africa"' (1986:3). My persistent enquiries yielded the information that, whereas archives at the Johannesburg Public Library and elsewhere possess microfilmed copies of old newspapers, the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit has an ageing collection of the *Sunday Times*, which included those issued in the nineteen-twenties. It was in these yellowed and crumbling pages that I was able to locate a number of brief stories written by 'Ben Eath'. I did encounter some bearing the initials 'H.C.B.' but could find none with the pseudonym 'Ben Africa'.[3] Contrary to expectation, Bosman's contributions to the *Sunday Times* continued into mid-1922. In view of the fragile condition of the newspapers, they had to be handled carefully, so that I was obliged to resort to the microfilmed versions for copies. Some of these were illegible, however, and it was necessary to reproduce material by hand.

Apart from my correction of one or two obvious typographical errors, I have not edited these juvenile works. They are available, here, for consultation by all who have an interest in Bosman's work. It must be acknowledged that his earliest efforts, dating from 1921 when he was sixteen years of age, are recognizably youthful and, as such, are flawed. Their value, however, lies in their revelation of a burgeoning talent and of tendencies that would persist into the mature writing. As Wordsworth intimates in his 'Immortality' Ode, 'the child is father of the man'.

Mitzi Andersen

3 *An adult 'Ben Africa' story, 'In the Beginning', was published in* The Sjambok *on 31 May 1929, during Bosman's term in prison.*

The Jeppe High School Magazine



Previous page: Jeppe High School. The main building was built between 1909 and 1911 to a design by Ralston, a student of Herbert Baker, and was in use when Bosman attended the school

On 5 February 1905, Herman Charles Bosman was born to Elisa, née Malan, and her husband, Jacobus,[1] in the small Cape settlement of Kuils River. Eleven years later, the Bosmans, who were of Afrikaner stock, settled temporarily in Potchefstroom, where Elisa had spent her childhood years. During their brief spell there, Herman and his younger brother, Pierre, attended school at the Potchefstroom College. When Jacobus Bosman successfully applied for employment on the City Deep gold-mine in Johannesburg, the family again moved, settling in Jeppestown in 1918. The education of the two boys was continued at the Jeppe Central and Jeppe High schools.

Jeppe High, says Bernard Sachs who was in the same class as Herman, was a school where 'more than due emphasis was placed on sport' (1971:19), an activity for which Bosman had no aptitude and in which he lacked interest.[2] Possibly the school's emphasis on sport rather than on academic achievement explains Rosenberg's statement that, while at Jeppe High, Bosman's 'marks sank to mediocre levels except in Afrikaans' (1981a:16). Rosenberg's comment is supported by the photographic reproduction of his 1920 Form III report, which records marks of 66% for English and 74% for Dutch (1981a:19). All the same, hers is a surprising revelation in view of Sachs's claim that his friend 'entered this institution equipped with a capacity for writing essays that had never been equalled' (1971:20).

This apparent contradiction requires further consideration in the light of Sachs's recollection that, during the school break, Bosman would read 'with a concentration that would shut out the rest of the world' and that, after school, he would make his way home, 'only taking his eyes from the book he was reading when he was crossing the road' (1971:19). Sachs also recalls that, by the time Bosman was fifteen, he had 'already studied Shakespeare, Shaw, Herman Melville, Poe and a host of others' (1971:10). Doubtless assisted by his enthusiasm for the school's new library, which

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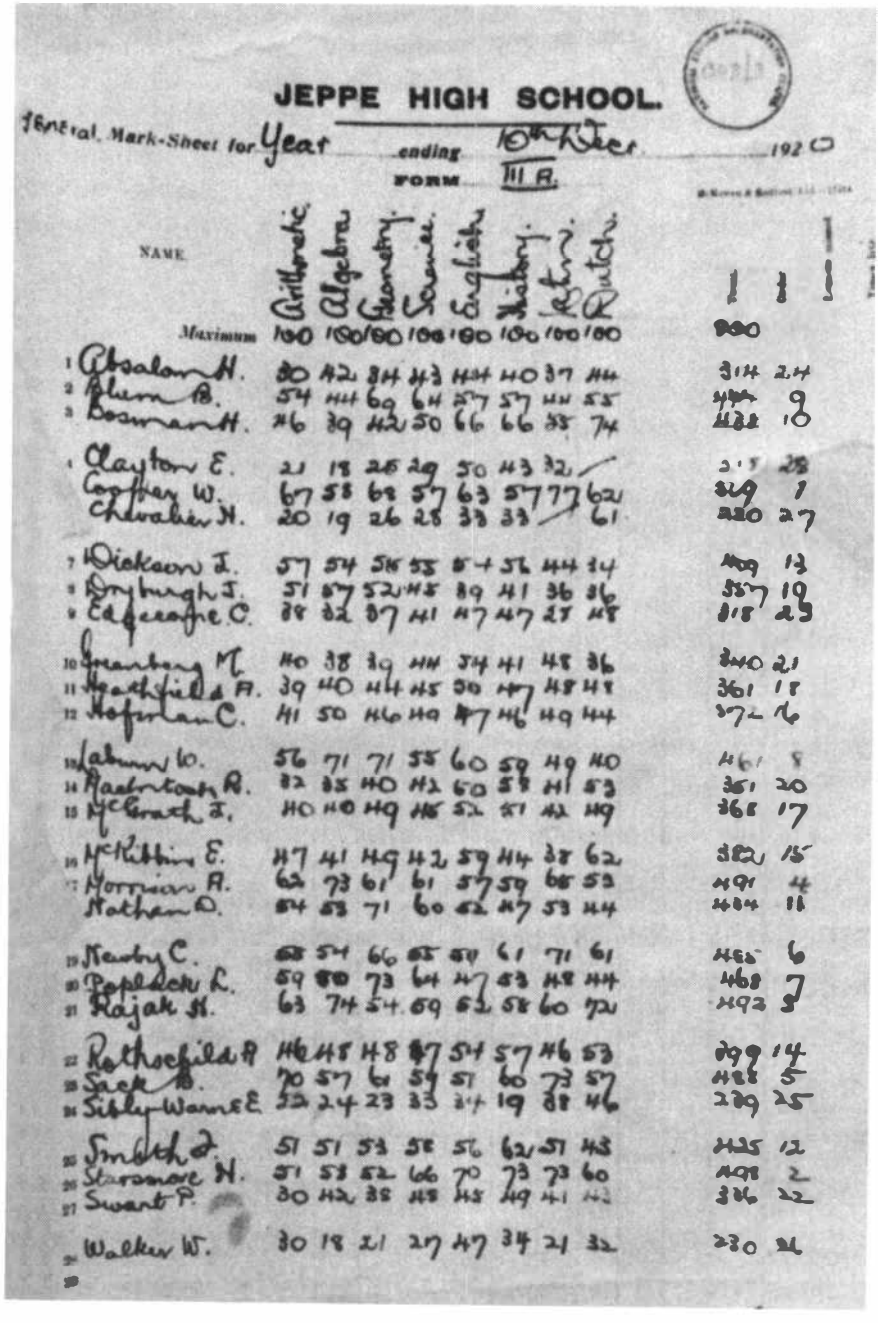
1 *Rosenberg (1981b:18) writes that, although married to Jacobus Bosman at the time of her son's birth, Elisa once confided to a neighbour that 'Herman was not Jacobus's son'. Rosenberg adds that Herman's 'true origins ... [remain] a matter for conjecture'.*

2 *In 'Jeppe High Revisited', Bosman tells of his return to his old school, years later. In the school hall, he encountered 'photographs of cricket and soccer teams. And I ambled about the hall feeling very inferior. For I knew that among all those hundreds of framed photographs you would not find my likeness anywhere; I would not appear in any one of those distinguished groups in cricket flannels or football jerseys' (1987:69).*



JEPPE HIGH SCHOOL.

General Mark-Sheet for Year ending 10th Sept. 1920

FORM IIIA.

	NAME	Arithmetic	Algebra	Geometry	Science	English	History	Geog. & Nat.	Dutch			
	Maximum	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	900		
1	Absalom H.	30	42	34	43	34	40	37	44	314	24	
2	Blum B.	54	44	69	64	57	57	44	55	444	9	
3	Boaman H.	46	39	42	50	66	66	33	74	432	10	
4	Clayton E.	21	18	26	29	50	43	32		219	28	
	Coetzer W.	67	58	69	57	63	57	77	62	510	1	
	Chevalier H.	20	19	26	28	33	33		61	220	27	
7	Dickson I.	57	54	56	55	54	56	44	34	409	13	
8	Dryburgh J.	51	57	52	45	89	41	36	36	357	19	
9	Edgecombe C.	38	32	37	41	47	47	25	48	318	23	
10	Greenberg M.	40	38	39	44	54	41	48	36	340	21	
11	Heathfield A.	39	40	44	45	50	47	48	48	361	18	
12	Hofmeyer C.	41	50	46	49	47	46	49	44	372	16	
13	Jabaun W.	56	71	71	55	60	59	49	40	461	8	
14	Kaaintaan R.	32	35	40	42	60	53	41	53	351	20	
15	McGrath J.	40	40	49	45	52	51	42	49	368	17	
16	McKibbin E.	47	41	49	42	59	44	38	62	382	15	
17	Morrison A.	62	73	61	61	57	59	68	59	491	4	
	Nathan D.	54	53	71	60	62	47	53	44	404	11	
19	Neeby C.	68	54	66	65	59	61	71	61	465	6	
20	Papsdeck L.	59	80	73	64	47	53	48	44	468	7	
21	Rajah H.	63	74	54	69	62	58	60	72	492	5	
22	Rothschild A	46	48	48	47	54	57	46	53	399	14	
23	Sack B.	70	57	61	54	51	60	73	57	428	5	
24	Sibly-Warne E.	32	24	23	33	34	19	38	46	229	25	
25	Smith J.	51	51	53	52	56	62	51	43	425	12	
26	Staromore N.	51	53	52	66	70	73	73	60	498	2	
27	Swart P.	30	42	38	48	45	49	41	43	336	22	
28	Walker W.	30	18	21	27	47	34	21	32	230	24	
29												

The teacher's mark sheet for the 1920 Form IIIA at Jeppe High School

provided his 'first serious introduction to literature' (1971:24), such exposure would have been influential. In defiance of Bosman's school record, therefore, and perhaps signalling his own perceptiveness and their teachers' insufficiency, Sachs has no hesitation in asserting that his friend

> wrote his school essays with that surpassing elegance of style which distinguishes his short stories of later years. These essays revealed a range of reading, a verbal keyboard, and a turn of phrase that was amazing in one so young. This Afrikaner from a Cape dorp made rings round the bright English pupils from Jeppe High School who came from very cultivated homes. His writing already scintillated with humour. (1971:12)

Bosman was not unaware of his gift. When writing his matriculation examination in mathematics at which he was quite 'hopeless' (his report shows marks ranging between 39% and 46%), he devoted the time to an essay in which he endeavoured to persuade his examiners – unsuccessfully in the event – that he was passworthy because of an excellence in English (Sachs 1971:25).

The two sketches which appeared in *The Jeppe High School Magazine* in 1921, and which are reproduced here, give some indication of the sixteen-year-old Bosman's ability with his pen. Rather than highlighting the 'surpassing elegance of style' referred to by Sachs, these initial publications, despite their impressive vocabulary, are characterized by their author's obvious, and sometimes forced, attempts to amuse his schoolfellows.[3] It is not surprising, therefore, to find that one of the items features a jest. What is unexpected, however, is that a youth of his age should display the measure of cynicism revealed in the sally upon members of parliament, whose integrity is called into question.

In their focus on Lockjaw Bones and his companion, Jotson, 'The Mystery of the Ex-M.P.' and 'The Mystery of Lenin Trotsky'[4] point to the young author's familiarity not only with current affairs[5] but, more especially,

3 *Bosman's footnoted explanation concerning the word 'enrounded' indicates the audience he has in mind. See page 9.*

4 *This title is not listed in Gray ed. (1986).*

5 *The name 'Lenin Trotsky' is obviously a combination of Lenin (Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov) and Leon Trotsky, both of whom participated in Russia's Bolshevik revolution. References to Trotsky and the Bolsheviks occur in the Johannesburg* Star *of the nineteen-twenties. See* Like it Was *(Clarke et al. eds 1987:74 & 75).*

with Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson, whom Bosman indubitably encountered in the school library. Bosman's acquaintance with Conan Doyle's idiom is apparent. The dignity of Doyle's Victorian gentlemen, however, is humorously overturned in these skits. Lockjaw Bones lacks the intellectual acuity of his model, who is a master in deduction. The 'ordinary police force' has to come to Bones's rescue – not unexpectedly since he has a 'bag of clues' that he subjects to an examination even before the start of an investigation. Furthermore, unlike Holmes and Watson, Bones and his assistant have their own material interests at heart. Surprisingly for a seemingly illustrious detective, Bones is in debt. He effectively solves the problem by eliminating his creditors, which he does by pushing them 'under a tram-car'. Neither he nor Jotson have any scruples about removing the 'loose change' from the pocket of a murder victim. The disclosure that they commit this felony immediately after Bones has declared that 'even a detective has his principles' is an early pointer to Bosman's characteristic reliance on irony. The two tales also anticipate the closing ironical turns that are typical of the later work. Also in evidence is an early instance of this writer's use of bathos which, in the following lines, is achieved by means of an unexpected descent in register:

> Bones commenced a close examination of Trotsky, and quickly came to the conclusion that, the spark of life having fled, it would be useless to endeavour to recover it. But, as my friend graphically expressed it, the question that now remained to be answered was: 'Who shoved him?'

Notwithstanding the author's immaturity and the related flaws in this youthful work, a careful reading cannot fail to uncover its potential.[6] The brief but prejudicial comments which Jotson makes about 'niggers' in 'The Mystery of Leon Trotsky' will also be noted. Bosman was raised in a society that regarded black people as inferior; moreover, he would have been exposed to derogatory remarks by his father who worked on the gold mines and risked replace-

6 *Readers may enjoy this humorous reflection also in the essay, 'Jeppe High Revisited'. 'Overcome [by] melancholy' at his failure in the sports' arena, he encourages himself to '"Look up some of the back numbers of the Jeppe High School Magazine ... And read some of those stories that I contributed to the mag twenty-five years ago. K.E.S. or St John's magazine never had such prose." And only then when I had placed myself on the defensive, did I realise how complete was my defeat. Measured against school-boy ideals, and in terms of school-boy clan-partisanship, is there any writer that does not stink?' (1987:69)*

ment by black workers at a lower rate of pay. Sachs, however, who knew his friend well, insists that there was no racial animosity in Bosman. It seems that in Jotson's remarks, too, the writer merely wished to guarantee the laughter of his school-fellows, which accords with Rosenberg's belief that Bosman's 'credo was laughter at any price' (1981b:37).

New Series. No. 30.

THE JEPPE HIGH SCHOOL MAGAZINE.

July, 1921.

The Mystery of the Ex-M.P.

One morning, having hurriedly drunk my breakfast, I emerged from the 'Edward the Professor' to find my friend, Lockjaw Bones, the world's most *carté blanche* [sic] criminologist, waiting for me outside (I don't know what *carté blanche* is [nor do I – Ed.][7] but that's what Bones was, anyhow).

'Hist!' he breathed between his teeth, pointing a finger, that simply pulsated with wrath, at a passing citizen. 'Time was when that man could have written M.P. after his name.'

I was absolutely dumbfounded at this intelligence. 'Bones!' I gasped, 'is he actually as unscrupulous – as unprincipled – as to be a Member of Parliament?'

'Not quite as bad as that,' was Bones's reply; 'M.P. merely stands for Mounted Police. In other words, he had the Mounted Police after him.'

I heaved a sigh of relief, and guffawed at the grim pleasantry.

Bones went on to relate that every morning, for several weeks, while ostensibly propping up the walls of the Post Office, he had noticed the Ex-M.P. hurrying along, looking neither to right nor left, with that far-away gaze in his eyes, with that same strained, almost anxious, look upon his features.

What was that man's secret? What was that dreadful mystery that *enrounded him? Was his fell purpose assault, battery, *malice prépense*, or *felo de se*?

As I followed at Lockjaw's heels, intent on solving the problem, I do not deny that I experienced a curious sensation – just as if I had been peremptorily ordered to have a bath. Yet it was not fear. But when our *quarry* stooped as if he were looking for a *rock* [pun],[8] I felt a sort of automatic yearning to go home and sign the pledge.

---

7 *The material in these second square brackets is in the text.*

8 *The square-bracketed material here is also in the text.*

We pursued our path and the Ex-M.P. without further incident, save that two of Bones's creditors and one of mine happened to spot us and made themselves thoroughly and quite unnecessarily objectionable. They clamoured for us to settle; so Bones pushed his two under a tram-car, which effectively settled them. Overcome with emotion at the fate of his colleagues, my creditor faded away – metaphorically and literally, which was much more to the point.

At length we had run the Ex-M.P. to earth. This, I conjectured, would be the penultimate scene; the end would probably be the gallows. The web which Bones had spun round our prey was perceptibly tightening. Ah! now we had him! Coming to a standstill before a barrow, he thrust his hand into his pocket, and – oh, horror! – drew something shiny from his pocket! Already Bones's foot was raised high above his head, till at the alcoholical moment, when he was about to send the instrument clattering to earth –

'Give me a thrupp'ny packet, please,' the prospective victim said, as he flung the still glittering coin at the pop-corn merchant.

* * *

Bones came out of hospital the following Sunday.

H.C.B.

*Form V. will understand this word. Others won't – it isn't in their syllabus.

The Mystery of Lenin Trotsky

In relating the various cases upon which my friend Lockjaw Bones, was engaged, it is but natural that I should touch more frequently upon his triumphs than upon his failures, for when this great criminologist erred, it only too frequently happened that the mystery was never solved, save by the ordinary police force. Yet the 'Mystery of Lenin Trotsky' was undoubtedly a failure, and it is still such a sore point with my amazing friend that whenever I mention it he indulges in much vain repetition and drowns his sorrows in the cocaine mug.

At midday, having locked up his roll-top desk with meticulous care, Lenin Trotsky closed the door of his office behind him, stepped into the street, adjusted his button-hole, and fell down dead.

Although the thoroughfare was deserted at this time of the day, nevertheless a crowd, among whom were Bones and myself, speedily collected round the body. Opening his bag of clues, Bones commenced a close examination of Trotsky, and quickly came to the conclusion that, the spark of life having fled, it would be useless to endeavour to recover it. But, as my friend graphically expressed it, the question that now remained to be answered was: 'Who shoved him?' For it was evident that he must have been killed by *esprit-de-corps*, which, the erudite Bones informed me, was Greek for 'culpable homicide.'

Bones sat for some moments on the kerbstone stroking his handsome blue chin, until suddenly jumping up he exclaimed: 'Jotty, old chap, we've been blind – blind as bats; but now I see it all! Doesn't this man's name, Lenin Trotsky, strike you as being at all magnificent – I mean significant?'

'Well, yes,' I replied; 'it does sound like the name of some nigger or Bolshevik or something unpleasant.'

'Excellent, Jotson, excellent! That was precisely my line of thought, whereby I found the solution of this mystery. Jotson, this is the work of Bolsheviks!'

'Bones!' I gasped, 'and of course you will have the assassins arrested?'

My friend's noble brow clouded, while anger blazed from his eye.

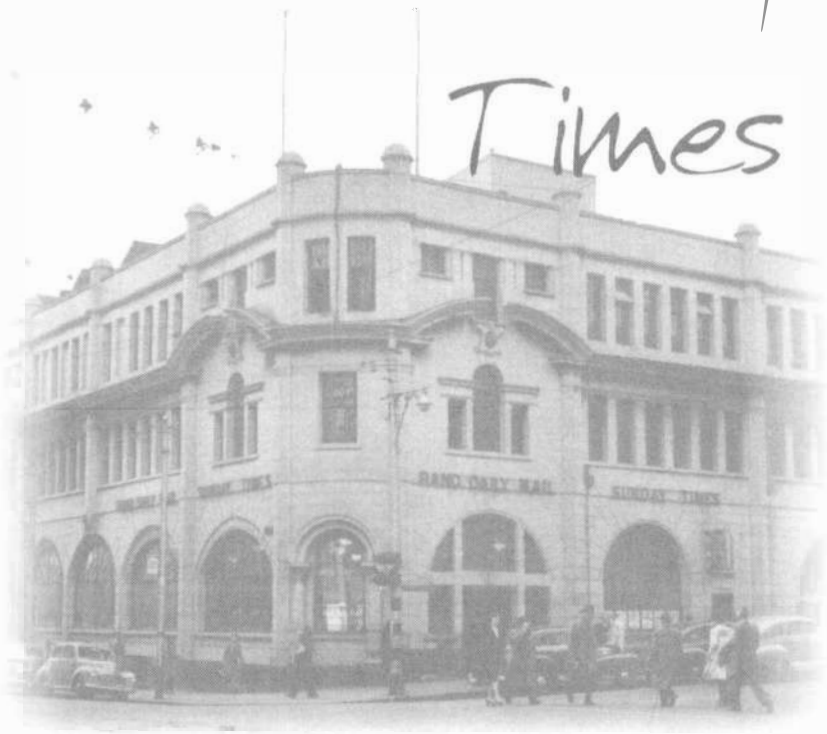
'What earthly right have you to suggest that I should deign to acknowledge a despicable gang of bloodthirsty cut-throats? Pick-pockets and liquor sellers I can tolerate, but I draw the line at Bolsheviks. No, Jotson; even a detective has his principles.'

Hereupon, having relieved the departed of his loose change, we left, the crowd following Bones under the impression that he was Douglas Fairbanks.

That evening, while we were playing the fascinating but uncertain game of Loo, the evening paper arrived. Bones, after nervously reading through a paragraph, flung the paper aside and with an agonising cry applied himself to the cocaine mug. I tore it – the paper – from his grasp. Thrust away in an obscure corner was a brief paragraph announcing that a Mr. Lenin Trotsky, who had for a long time been suffering from a weak heart, had that day died suddenly in the street – and Bones's name was not even mentioned! Stay! The passage went on to state that the police were searching for two suspicious-looking men – possibly Bolsheviks – in connection with the affair.

BEN EATH

The Johannesburg Sunday Times



While Bosman was writing for *The Jeppe High School Magazine*, he was also producing tales for a very different audience. During 1921 and 1922, he successfully submitted almost a score of them to the Johannesburg *Sunday Times*. In an attempt to prevent the editor from realizing that he was publishing contributions written by a school-child, however, Bosman resorted to at least two pseudonyms. In addition to 'Ben Eath', the initials 'H.C.B.', which indicate authorship of the Lockjaw Bones sketches in his school's magazine, were used here, too.[1] The young Bosman's improved financial standing was noticed by a school-fellow,[2] who threatened disclosure unless he had a share in the new-found wealth; in return, he would supply the writer with plots for his use. Aegidius Jean Blignaut, who had the story from Bosman himself, reports how the horrified discovery that one of these plots was borrowed from Shakespeare, prompted the youngster to consult a barrister and 'together they tried to explain to Guy Gardner, the literary editor of the paper, how plagiarism had been unwittingly committed and he had bought a stolen idea' (1981:75). Bosman offered to refund the amount concerned and, to his great relief, the matter was dropped. Needless to say, his submissions to the *Sunday Times* ceased.

The diversity in setting and in plot (not all the plots are borrowed ones) points to the lively imagination for which the later writing is justly celebrated. Obviously, Bosman had not yet formed any lasting opinions about the nature of art. Later, as Blignaut tells us, Bosman would be responsible for giving South African letters their 'ethos' (1981:41); he would also exhort local writers in English to 'write South African', rather than rely on European literary models (Bosman 1981:97). Only one of the *Sunday Times* submissions is obviously set in South Africa: although 'A Sad Tale' takes place in Johannesburg, it has no local colour. All of the remaining tales are located elsewhere. Indeed, 'Kairutu' focuses on the Indonesian island of Ceram, where 'the brilliant plumage of cockatoos and birds of paradise enlivened the vivid green of the sugar canes'; and the action in 'The Way to Glory' occurs under 'the Mexican sun ... the Mexican moon and the Mexican stars'.

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1 *As mentioned in the general introduction to this volume, Stephen Gray (1986:3) writes that Bosman's* Sunday Times *contributions appeared under the names 'Ben Eath' and 'Ben Africa', although I was unable to trace any 'Ben Africa' items in that newspaper. Some* Sunday Times *narratives under the similar name, 'Safrica', do not appear to have emanated from Bosman's pen. Please see Appendix II in this volume.*

2. *Rosenberg (1981b:22) identifies him as Bosman's friend, Edwin McKibbin.*

Bosman submitted his contributions to the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* when it was housed, with the *Rand Daily Mail*, in these premises at the corner of Rissik and Jeppe Streets, Johannesburg. This photograph was taken some years later

The quotation from 'Kairutu' and, *inter alia*, the following extract from 'Fraternal Love' testify to the felicity of style commended by Sachs:

> For four years the opposing banners floated over the blood-stained fields. The swords were dripping with the best and bravest blood. The earth, filled with pain and darkness, with misery and distress, was left without a star. In the trenches the men, in addition to facing the enemy, had to battle with the obstacles of Nature, and in scores they were scattered, like Autumn's withered leaves, by the cavalry of the icy blast and the infantry of the snows.

Not all the tales are, however, as Blignaut supposed, 'stories of quality' (1981:75). His assumption was clearly based on his exposure to Bosman's later work. Some of these early plots are trivial in nature, as in 'The Dilemma', whose protagonist cannot decide whether it is preferable to go to work by tram or to walk. The quality of the writing is also impaired in other ways. Blignaut describes the speed and the assurance with which Bosman composed during their four years of collaboration in the nineteen-thirties:

> Nothing was rewritten, for Herman thought that was the surest way of wiping the freshness off one's work; it was like fondling the gold from butterfly wings (1981:172).

When he was in partnership with Blignaut, however, Bosman was an experienced writer and had refined his creative techniques. Unnoticed by the *Sunday Times* editor, however, some of the items he accepted for publication are marred by carelessness, suggesting that Bosman was reluctant to revise even then. 'Saved from the Waste-Paper Basket' relates how tears course down the king's furrowed brow. Equally absurd (even if prompted by humour) is the first-person narrator who views fondly his own 'gentle, tear-dimmed eyes' ('The Watch'), as well as his 'ascetic features', 'wistful smile' and 'expressive countenance' ('A Sad Tale').

'The Hand that Rules the World' is another of the tales affected by Bosman's unwillingness to reconsider his work. To succeed, its language has to be appropriate for its initial suggestion concerning a hand that the narrator holds and for his revelation at the close. The words 'the hand he loved' and the 'kisses of feverish ecstasy' do not, however, accord with both levels of meaning.


FULL HISTORY OF THE REVOLT ON BACK PAGE

CASTLE LAGER
SOUTH AFRICA'S BEST.

Sunday Times

A PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE

CIRCULATION SEVEN TIMES LARGER THAN THAT OF ANY OTHER TRANSVAAL WEEKLY.

"CASTLE" BEER
SOUTH AFRICA'S BEST.

Vol. XV.—No. 837] TWELVE PAGES.] JOHANNESBURG, TRANSVAAL, MARCH 19, 1922. Price Threepence

THE PEOPLE'S COLUMN

A LETTER FOR HOME
The Hands that Kessit

THE CHERUB on PACKING

FROM LONDON TOWN

REVOLUTIONARY DRAGON OR BOLSHISAURUS

ST. JANNIE AND THE RED DRAGON

JANNIE: Now I've got him, I wonder what the d—, or, beg pardon! I shall do with him?

PASSING SHOW

The front page of a 1922 edition of the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* at about the time Bosman's early work was being published

All the same, this tale and many others are well conceived, and it would be doing Bosman an injustice if my criticism were to leave an impression that the juvenile writings have no worth. There is no denying a facility with language amply supported by a precocious vocabulary. Not unexpectedly, since the *Sunday Times* tales were written at much the same time as the Lockjaw Bones sketches, the multi-faceted humour is in evidence, as is the extraordinary cynicism and the use of bathos and of irony, especially in unexpected twists at the close. There is little doubt that the influence of O. Henry has a part in these surprise endings. Rosenberg (1981b:22) mentions that he was one of Bosman's favourite authors; and it is surely no coincidence that Bosman has a tale entitled 'The Hand that Rules the World'. One of O. Henry's is 'The Hand that *Riles* the World'. Perhaps the writer most admired by Bosman was Edgar Allan Poe. Bosman regarded his first encounter with Poe as 'an immortal moment' (Sachs 1971:24) and his influence is manifest in the focus on suicide, crime and the gallows and on a maniac's escape from an asylum. The action that takes place under cover of dark is doubtless a response to the ambience created by the American storyteller.[3]

3 *It is not my intention to consider all the literary influences on Bosman's short fiction at this time. I mention O. Henry and Poe because of the particular favour accorded by the youthful Bosman to these two writers of short stories.*

The Fowl

Peal after peal of laughter rang out into the stillness of the afternoon air, as the driver, rocking from side to side in his innocent mirth, sent the taxi through the streets at a tremendous rate. On we rushed madly, spinning round corners on two wheels, driving panic-stricken pedestrians to the side of the road. Suddenly we swerved, turned right about, and sped in the opposite direction back to town, the while the chauffeur gave vent to his glee.

'Hi!' I cried, as we jumped round another corner, 'what's the matter?'

Convulsed with merriment, and with difficulty suppressing another roar, he shouted back: 'I wonder where the warder thinks I am. By now they must be searching all over the asylum for me.'

Regardless of consequences, I jumped.

Having sorted myself, and discovered that there were no bones broken, I set off back along the road we had come, and had walked some distance, when an infuriated farmer rushed out, dangling a very emaciated-looking fowl, which, he heatedly explained, I had run over in the motor-car. As we were both splendid talkers, quite a large crowd had soon collected to hear our fluency, whereupon I deemed it advisable to depart from the field, handing him the seven shillings he demanded, and receiving the fowl in exchange. The rest of my journey was a perpetual misery, as I walked along with an air of unconcern, holding the bird at some considerable distance from me, and not deigning to heed the guffaws of the passers-by. When I arrived at the gate, Ella, sweet woman, was already waiting for me.

'Look here, dovey,' I said, 'see what your ickle lovey has brought you.'

Seizing the bird, and, a sufficient excuse for my lateness not being forthcoming, she playfully hit me with a poker over my cranium, begging me to help with the dishes. Not being able to refuse so small a favour to anyone, leave alone Ella (she was still clutching the poker), I retired to the kitchen.

Suddenly, with a swish-swish of feminine draperies, accompanied by the thud of heavy feet, Ella strode in. I stood for some moments, lost in admiration for this wonderful woman. Her features were as beautiful as the dawn (a specially red dawn, that is); her lustrous orbs were like two glass beads stuck in a piece of clay, while her melodious voice vividly reminded one of velvet and tinkling cymbals as she rasped out:-

'So you thought your taxi killed that fowl, did you?'

Before I could dispel so absurd a notion, she concluded: 'It has been dead for over a week.'

H.C.B.

Three Phases

The grey twilight had already given place to darkness, when, having removed the tell-tale particles of confetti which still adhered to her dress, the bride, radiantly beautiful, stepped from her compartment into the corridor. Softly she stole to where her husband was standing, too intently gazing at an object he held in his hands to notice her approach. When he raised the light-green frame to his lips and kissed it ecstatically, her curiosity was thoroughly roused. Standing on tiptoe, she looked over her husband's shoulder, and saw that the light-green frame contained a photo of herself. She silently returned to her compartment, and far into the night was still wondering whether she was worthy of such noble, high-minded love.

* * *

That had been the beginning, but after a year or two her husband's passion had worn off – his ardour had given way to business cares, and with the gradual, almost imperceptible estrangement between them, love had grown rapidly between her and a returned explorer, around whom still clung the glamour of adventure. Yet through it all, in her inmost heart she pitied her staid, stolid husband, whose imagination never rose above his business affairs.

* * *

It was on a Friday afternoon that matters came to a climax. Long she stood looking at her lover; then, when the full realisation of what had occurred dawned upon her, she sank down to the floor of the drawing-room and knelt beside her dead husband. She felt incensed against the world in general, but particularly resented her lover's action. She felt now that she hated him with an intense hatred, for had he not killed her husband – her husband who, after all, had ever borne her a passionate affection? As her eyes lighted upon the little light-green photo-frame, which, having fallen from her husband's pocket, was lying face downwards on the carpet, she remembered that incident in the train during their honeymoon and her cup of sorrow was full to the brim. She lifted it up and looked at it. It was the same green frame she knew so well, but gazing at her with laughing eyes – was the face of another woman!

BEN EATH

The Dilemma

This morning I was faced with an awful dilemma. And yet I found a solution. I was on the point of setting out to the office, when the question arose as to the method of travelling thither, and after a few moments' reflection I came to the conclusion that, so far as I was concerned, there were only two ways of reaching it – I could either walk or go by tram.

In considering the former alternative, I quickly foresaw the fatigues – perceived the discomforts – attendant on violent exertion, and already pictured myself arriving at the office hot, jaded and dejected.

While the trees were laden with blossoms, while waves of happy music rippled from the tiny throats of the little birds in the boughs, while the air was filled with perfume and great white clouds were floating in the sky, I would be wearily trudging through the dusty streets.

No, walking did not appeal to me!

If I went by tram I should in all probability have to stand, or, even if I did succeed in obtaining a seat, I would be jammed up somewhere with hardly sufficient room for breathing. Then, again, as the conductor owed me a grudge for having several weeks before attempted to palm a French sixpence off on to him, he would be certain to test my money in full view of the other passengers, and at the conclusion of his examination would pretend to fall over my feet.

Clearly, going by tram was as unthinkable as walking.

As I have stated previously, I was faced with an exasperating dilemma this morning. And yet I came to a decision.

* * *

I determined to take a day off and remain at home!

BEN EATH

Kairutu

Kairutu lived with his family on the island of Ceram, and, although his hut was not as commodious as the one which had been destroyed by the earthquake, nevertheless he knew that it was the largest in the vicinity. His neighbours were likewise aware of this fact, and respected him accordingly. Then, again, his son having gone into service at a coffee plantation near the coast, Kairutu calculated that when he returned the following spring, he would bring with him sufficient silver to purchase another buffalo, which, as his present stock already numbered four, would certainly make him the wealthiest and most envied man throughout the length and breadth of Ceram.

And thus, while an occasional fleet cassowary flashed through the undergrowth, and the brilliant plumage of cockatoos and birds of paradise enlivened the vivid green of the sugar canes, Kairutu ploughed his plot with his buffaloes, sowed his rice and maize, and was content.

* * *

It was night. The village was wrapped in slumber sweet, while an aspen moon quivered in the heavens, shedding her mellow beams upon the limpid lagoons and, by the skilful manipulation of light and intense shadow, making the sleeping world below seem a veritable paradise. That night thieves hacked their way through the dense surang, broke down the gate of the enclosure and stole two of Kairutu's buffaloes.

The poignancy of the old man's grief, when he discovered his loss, is indescribable. At first he raged about the place, swearing vengeance on the perpetrators, but on the following day his anger subsided, and he resigned himself to submissive grief and dumb despair. Next day, however, this inaction becoming intolerable to one of his temperament, he had recourse to prayer, earnestly beseeching his gods to bring back the thieves.

* * *

The following night his fervent request was granted, for the thieves were brought back – and stole the remaining two buffaloes.

BEN EATH

The Dilettante

Every morning on my way to the office I found him standing in front of the Library, waiting for the doors to open.

His lofty, intellectual brow increased the general rigidity of his ascetic countenance, while that far-away gaze in his steel-blue eyes showed how distant from mundane matters his thoughts were.

At night, on my return, I noticed that he was always the last to leave the Library, and I observed that occasionally there was a wistful, half-regretful look on his face, while at other times his countenance bore an expression of mild complacency – even of benignity and broad philanthropy.

But in the morning there was no mistake about that strenuous eagerness which pervaded his features – which even showed through that look of intense absorption as he stood on the pavement, waiting for the Library doors to open …

Each day when I went to the office he was waiting on the pavement; each day when I returned the Library doors just being locked behind him, until, having indulged in much speculation to no purpose, I determined to once and for all solve the problem as to which were the books that so irresistibly drew that intellectual giant to the Library.

* * *

He was already waiting on the pavement the following morning when I arrived, intent on finding a solution to the puzzle. As soon as the doors swung open he rushed in, while I followed some distance in his wake. Having arrived at the Reference Department, he went up to a shelf, took down a book, and with a sigh of placid contentment plunged into Chapter xxxiv of the seventeenth volume of 'The Inner Secrets of Betty's Boudoir.'

Following his example, I likewise took down a volume and commenced reading.

* * *

And in the blissful days that followed I was the first to arrive on the pavement, impatiently tapping the kerb with my foot, waiting for the Library doors to open … .

BEN EATH

When my Anger Blazed

And yet he didn't sack me!

For years the manager had been harassing me with various vexations. Flinging up his hands in horror and opening his mouth so wide that you could see right down into his works, he would give vent to a string of opprobrious epithets, and after explaining that I was ruining the company, he used to wind up his eloquent speech, full of gunpowder and windy declamation by referring in pointed terms to my face.

Now, although anybody can see that there is something radically wrong with my face, nevertheless, as I find it most convenient for pushing my hat over, I think he has absolutely no call to criticise it, and, therefore, whenever he delivered himself of something choice about my features, I mentally determined that when he died I would be the first to attend his funeral. The fact that all the other clerks sniggered when the manager was in the middle of his harangue only proves that some people will laugh at anything.

It was this morning that matters reached a climax. The manager had been ranting and raving as usual, and at the conclusion of a succession of fearsome blasts had plainly given me to understand that he loved me no longer; all of which culminated in my long-smouldering anger bursting out, whereupon, commencing with a few scathing sentences, I launched forth a tirade, in the course of which I raked him and his doings from end to end.

After an attack on all his ancestors, which left them without a shred or shadow of honour – without a vestige of repute – I concluded by calling him a second-hand gargoyle with a pair of feet somebody else had thrown away.

And yet he didn't sack me!

* * *

I am almost sorry now that I didn't speak loudly enough for him to hear me.

BEN EATH

Fraternal Love

Loudly the man opposite me declaimed against the injustice of our social system. 'It is not that I've an axe to grind,' he said, 'for I do not blame my brother in the least.' Hereupon he commenced the story of his life.

'We were two brothers,' he said, 'and when the late war broke out, and the world went back to the caves and dens of savagery – when nations, with the blood-lust upon them, sprang at each other's throats, when the horizon was lurid with the flames of burning cities – then one brother responded to the call of duty; the other,' he said, in tones scornful and contemptuous, 'the other shirked his obligations and remained at home.

'For four years the opposing banners floated over the blood-stained fields. The swords were dripping with the best and bravest blood. The earth, filled with pain and darkness, with misery and distress, was left without a star. In the trenches the men, in addition to facing the enemy, had to battle with the obstacles of Nature, and in scores they were scattered, like Autumn's withered leaves, by the cavalry of the icy blast and the infantry of the snows.

'In the meantime,' the man opposite me continued, his brow clouded, and anger blazing from his eyes, 'the one who stayed at home speedily massed a fortune. How he had the heart to retain it passes my comprehension, considering the fact that every day of his existence he must have met the withered hand of beggary and the bloodless lips of famine.

'Then, when the clouds of battle had rolled away, and the sword was sheathed, the one who had joined up, his duty done, returned, penniless and broken in health and spirit – and he was pushed aside by the cold hand of his brother's avarice, for owing to their altered circumstances, the other refused to recognise him now.

'Mind you,' the man concluded, 'I don't blame my brother, but still —

* * *

He looked at me curiously as I endeavoured to console him. 'You see,' he said, 'I am the one who stayed at home. Still, I don't blame my brother for going ... .'

BEN EATH

A Sad Tale

Venice!

Well may the poet in his ecstasy have remarked, 'see Venice and die!' Reader, can you picture to yourself this city, slumbering on the azure Adriatic, under the blue of the vaulted heavens, while the gentle, ozone-laden zephyrs are dreamily wafted to and fro?

What's that? You can't? You're a blamed idiot, then.

However, the question of whether or not you are able to appreciate the beauties of Venice is of little consequence really, for the scene of my story is laid in a street in Johannesburg.

* * *

Having suddenly stopped speaking to myself, I, the hero, with determination clearly written upon my ascetic features, set off in the direction of a chemist's, which establishment I was on the point of entering when, to my unbounded astonishment, Petroleum K. Jones, an old acquaintance of mine, came out of it. I held up my hand to stay his progress.

'Don't stay my progress,' Jones exclaimed, petulantly.

'All right,' I replied; 'but what have you been doing in this shop, anyway?' Averting his gaze, my friend held up for my inspection a phial, the label on which read:-

CYANIDE OF POTASSIUM.

'Heavens!' I gasped. 'Is – is it as bad as all that?' Jones bowed his head in meek submission.

'Yet consider for a moment the result of this rash action,' I pursued. 'You'll be chucked into your grave, with the rain soaking into the soil, your tomb-stone dripping with wet, and the storms of winter moaning and raging over your buried head. And – and,' I concluded, 'cyanide has a horrible taste.'

His resolution having gradually weakened throughout this appeal, Jones at these words fully realised the error of his ways, whereupon, bursting into tears, he promised to give himself another chance. I, however, was adamant.

'What guarantee will I have,' said I, 'that you won't take your life after all, the moment you're out of my sight? For safety's sake, hand over the bottle to me.' Having eagerly complied with this request, the would-have-been-suicide turned and took his departure.

The while a wistful smile played over my expressive countenance, I watched my friend disappear round the corner. Then, my hand trembling slightly, I drew out the stopper and swallowed the contents of the phial. A moment later I was lying in the middle of the street, with my toes turned up, contently waiting for the hearse.

BEN EATH

Human Depravity

I recently propounded a theory that there is no limit of shame or baseness to which human degeneracy will not stoop. Like many others which I have at various times advanced, this dating theory has been received with frantic scorn by some of my brother scientists, and with an eager eye by others. Indeed, some of them are very much offended when I call them brother, and when I suggested to Sir Oliver Lodge that I would publish my great discovery as his own theory, this ordinarily unprejudiced man, instead of thanking me, threatened to run me in. Such is professional jealousy.

* * *

It was a dark night. Without, the oaks and elms were tossing their branches defiantly to the raging storm. The burglar, having taken his time and the plate was on the point of taking his departure, when he paused irresolute on the threshold.

Would he sink to such a depth of degradation? Was not this robbery itself an act from which a man who had within his breast a decent, throbbing heart, would turn away with repugnance? Why, then, he pondered, should he still further jeopardise his soul? And yet —

'After all, what is Fate?' he reflected, 'but an infinite juggler, who fills his wooden tragedians with hopes, desires and ambitions, with love, with fear, and with hatred? He watches these puppets as they struggle and fail – their minds ceaselessly centred on the hour-glass, their thoughts for ever on the running of the sand. He sees them outwit each other and themselves; he hears lullabies at cradles and the fall of clods on coffins. Finally, his play is a continuous performance, in which he sees hypocrisy robed and rewarded.

Filled with immeasurable bitterness at the thoughts of the height from which he had himself fallen, the burglar silently re-entered the room. A flash of lightning, throwing his features into bold relief, revealed his jaw rigidly set, his teeth gleaming. He reached the opposite end of the room and drew his dagger from its sheath. Once – twice – like a snake of molten

silver, the weapon flashed through the all-pervading darkness – and the burglar, having cut off a slice of bread, replaced the loaf on the table.

BEN EATH

The Watch

With gentle, tear-dimmed eyes and my hands thrust deep into my trouser pockets, I stood shivering on the pavement, looking back through Time's dark avenue upon a fading past.

This, then, I reflected, was my return from the cold, hard world, whither I had gone to make known the great truths I had discovered – truths which no one had heard or wanted to hear. As the moaning night-wind swept past me, whispering solemn secrets to the listening leaves, I thought of the friends I had known and laughed with, now lying forever silent under the waving grass. I thought of death-beds stained with bitter tears, and graves in trackless deserts.

It was a cold night and I was glad that the streets were dark and deserted – glad that there was no one about to recognise or to hail me. Turning a corner, I came upon a man whose blotched and heavy face denoted the drunkard; but what especially attracted my attention was a watch-chain dangling invitingly from his waistcoat.

'After all,' I pondered, 'what is honesty but the by-word of fiends, and who but fools march and fight, bleed and die, beneath its tawdry flag?'

Already my hand was stealing towards the object of my desires when, hearing the sound of approaching footsteps, I slunk across the road. Only then I realised to what depths of degradation I had actually sunk, for this nocturnal wanderer was no other than the minister, whose guileless features, frank and open as the day, were thrown into vivid relief by the light of a street-lamp.

How sordid was my intention – how base and misspent had been my whole life when compared with this good man's righteousness. Yet there was no need for despondency, I determined; my case was not beyond all hope.

Thus, resolving to make one more attempt at my reclamation, I again set out upon the road of Life, with honesty and virtue, as personified in the minister, to be my guiding star.

I took a last look round.

* * *

The minister was just disappearing round the corner. So was the watch.

BEN EATH

Saved from the Waste-Paper Basket

I do not claim that this story is in any way original, as it is simply a tale of human love that endureth – a tale of blasted hopes and shattered ambitions. It is a tale that was hoary with age when man yet swung from branch to branch amid the tropic forests, and it will still be told when this earth of ours hangs dead and motionless, and the stars shall have decayed.

* * *

On the outskirts of the Black Forest – near where, a hundred years later, Saint Joachim was born and, what is of infinitely greater credit to the place, was afterwards killed – there dwelt an old king with a surplusage of daughters. A dragon was at that time stalking about the country, breathing forth brimstone and eating men. Among other things, this monster was obviously a socialist, for with a fine impartiality he took toll from the castle and the cottage.

Thus, driven to desperation, the king proclaimed that whoever destroyed the dragon would be granted one of his twelve daughters in payment; whereupon there was started, from one end of the kingdom to the other, a procession of knights in shining armour, but as all, without a solitary exception, were placed by the dragon in the spot where he calculated they would do most good, that sagacious creature basked in the sunshine and was content.

Then, when the clouds were darkest, and hope was at its lowest ebb, there came to the palace a knight riding barebacked (I am referring to the horse's back, of course). But why did everybody in the palace go frantic with glee? Why did the king, skipping gaily down the stairs, the while tears were coursing down his furrowed brow, embrace this knight? Why, indeed? Take three guesses. Right you are; that's what it was. Attached to the stranger's left foot by a piece of string was the head of the dragon. The knight had slain the monster!

For the conqueror to choose a princess for himself was the work of a moment and, seeing Yolanda, the fairest of his daughters – clinging to the

victor's arm – 'Go forth into the world, my children, and God bless you both,' said the old king simply.

The postern was flung wide; and while a gay shout rang the rafters and the trumpet sounded from the battlements, the knight galloped away from the palace. Long the ominous clatter of hoof-beats reverberated through the halls – but of all these the king heard nothing. He was lying dead upon the carpet of his chamber .....

For he perceived that the knight had forgotten to take with him the princess.

BEN EATH

The Hand that Rules the World

The shaded lights gleamed fantastically, casting weird shadows as they fitfully strove to penetrate the darkness. The air, languorous and perfume-laden, exercised a somniferous influence on all assembled, while the low, monotonous hum, which pervaded even this secluded retreat, was the only indication of the sordid world which lay without – the world of strife and biffs and wicked words.

His heart thrilled and throbbed with fresh courage and renewed ambition, and the blood which coursed through his veins seemed fired with a new vigour and energy; as he held the hand he loved between his own toil-worn palms. With an odd admixture of masterfulness and timidity, his tremulous fingers closed upon it, caressing it rapturously.

He had an inexplicable apprehension – the kind of feeling which comes to all of us at times – that dozens of pairs of enquiring eyes were fixed upon him, eyes in which curiosity was mingled with envy. Yet he heeded them not. Let them stare on! He was possessed of a supreme happiness which could never be theirs. Let them stare on! How could they even remotely fathom the thoughts and sensations that throbbed in his breast?

Then, with an air of mad irresponsibility and joyous abandon, he raised the hand to his lips and, as if bidding defiance to those who were gazing at him, imprinted upon it kisses of feverish ecstasy. Again and again he kissed it, and yet more fervent did his caresses become when he found that that hand lay yielding and passive in his ....

But, reader, lest without due deliberation you condemn him for having been foolishly and extravagantly romantic, try to remember that to a large extent his action was justified.

For, after all, ace, king, queen, jack, ten and nine of the same suit is a hand of which no one need be ashamed.

BEN EATH

The Deserter

Having drawn up the remnants of his forces in battle array, the Red leader harangued his men, exhorting them to fling off their yokes of oppression and reach out after the banner of Liberty, floating on the far horizon. 'You've won boys,' the general cried, at the conclusion of his passionate oration, every sentence of which was enthusiastically applauded by the revolutionaries in their trenches. 'But, remember, don't kick the capitalist when he's down: hit him with a pick-handle.'[4]

Hardly had the thunder of applause died down when, with a curious sound, like the wailing of a tired wind, a bullet went whistling over their heads and crashed through a plate-glass window, whereupon, wishing he had been a better man and knew more hymns, a Scotsman named Van der Merwe flung away his rifle and raced off madly in the direction of home and safety.

Appalled by such flagrant desertion in the face of the foe, the general made use of language which, no doubt, in calmer moments he would regret. 'Fetch him back!' he shouted at length, in a voice like tearing linoleum. Untrustworthy though many members of the commando may have been, there was one man, at all events, whose soul was not dead to all honour – one man who responded to duty's call.

Amid cheers this individual set off in pursuit and, leaping lithely over the obstacles in the road, gradually gained upon his quarry. The general, meanwhile, had hastily climbed a lamp-post, from which point of vantage he shouted out the progress of the race. 'He's only half a block behind him,' he cried, 'and gaining like mad. There's only ten yards separating them now! Three yards! Two feet! He's only about six inches behind the deserter —'

'Damnation!' the general exclaimed as, slipping from the lamp-post, he clasped his brow in anguish, 'he's five yards in front of him!'

BEN EATH

4 *The tenor of the general's exhortation suggests that Bosman had heard some discussion of the 1911 labour dispute in Johannesburg, when Mary Fitzgerald (Pickhandle Mary) and her gang of supporters, having broken into a hardware store, armed themselves with pickhandles to support their demand for freedom of speech. See* Like it Was *(Clarke et al. eds 1987:59).*

Caste

Professor Phineas C. Finn, his brow moist and his hand trembling, was in a condition of deepest melancholy bordering on blank despair, as he gazed with unseeing eyes at the tongues of flame which leapt up, flared and subsided.

No, perhaps it is not an unheard-of or, for that matter, even an unusual occurrence for a professor of entomology to marry his housekeeper; but if, as in this instance, the household should include the professor's twenty-year-old daughter, unpleasantness is more than likely to result.

The professor realised this fact only too clearly, and therefore he sat, sorrowfully contemplating the consequences of this rash act. How was he to break this news to his daughter – his daughter who held such pronounced views of her own regarding the proper management of menials? Small wonder that he shuddered at the sound of every footstep – that he quivered and shook with chilling fear at the slightest creak of a door being opened.

He pictured to himself that look of incredulous bewilderment overspreading his daughter's features; vividly he saw her haughty countenance change from amazement to scornful disdain as the truth would begin to dawn upon her; then, finally, he beheld her when, bursting into tears, she rushed headlong from his study, her heart for ever broken, her ideals one and all shattered beyond repair!

The thought of his daughter's distress now became intolerable to the professor, yet from the truth there was no escape. Admittedly this position was untenable, but what was to be done? What could be done?

Thus ruminating on the immediate future, when his daughter's azure eyes, unused of yore to aught but laughter, would be swimming in tears, because her father had married beneath him, the professor sat forward in his arm-chair, gazing with unseeing eyes at the tongues of flame as they leapt up, flared and subsided, waiting for his daughter's entrance.

* * *

He waited in vain, however, for that morning she had eloped with the milk-man.

BEN EATH

The Way to Glory

It is about ten years ago, as the time flies, that I met this person at the Cafe of the Assorted Saints. His features were bronzed and tanned by the Mexican sun, and also by the Mexican moon and the Mexican stars; but what struck me most forcibly about him was his expression of brooding melancholy and gloomy dejection. In fact, it was only when the sound of some dozen odd shots temporarily broke the stillness of the drowsy forenoon that his features relaxed somewhat and he smiled, revealing that he had once been a man.

'And so for about five years,' he said, 'Bill and myself struggled on in all the nakedness of disappointment, and for five years the future seemed daily to grow yet more hopeless, until one day my uncle, who always had a weak chest, stopped a rifle-bullet with it, whereupon I inherited his entire fortune, which, as a matter of course, I shared with Bill.

'It was then that my friend – despite everything I still call him friend – flung aside the tawdry rags of hypocrisy which through all this had hitherto yet clung to him, and stood exposed for what he actually was – the most selfish and ungrateful scoundrel that it has been my misfortune to come across. To make a short story shorter still, Bill, assisted by a disreputable old parson who did the praying while he himself did the swindling, advanced by leaps and bounds in the Government service, until he was appointed head of the Cuerpo Diplomatico. It was then that he showed his base ingratitude, for, having waded through my inheritance, I waited on him with a view to reminding him of past favours. All he did was to throw me out upon the world.

'Catch him by the scruff of his neck,' he shouted to his servants, 'and throw him out upon the world.'

My acquaintance paused, and for some moments we sat in silence, each deep in contemplation. 'And thus,' I said at length, 'while the other fellow, who owes everything to you, is living in luxury – ' 'Not exactly,' the man opposite me replied, 'you remember those shots we heard some moments ago? Well, that was Bill and the minister being executed for betraying State secrets.'

BEN EATH

So I planked down the nominal sum of ten shillings. 'Put me in touch with gran'pa, please,' I said to the medium.

'Hallo! Is that you, gran'pa?' I asked. 'I guess that's me right enough, son' – came the response.

'And what's it like up there, gran'pa?' I queried further.

'Everything here at the back of the Illimitable,' he replied, 'is bright and beautiful, and our happiness is complete. Jack the Ripper and Bill Shakespeare here say the same. . . . . What's that?. . . .Strong smell of garlic, did you say?. . . .Oh, that's Julius Caesar leading the Portuguese band.'

'What's death like, gran'pa?' I questioned finally. 'Is the transition at all sudden?'

Hereupon my aged ancestor related the circumstances attendant on his departure to the back of the Immeasurable.

* * *

'And so, as the young fellow kept on urging me to accompany him, I at length gave way to his entreaties, but, needless to say, I still very much regret my folly. Well, although realising that it was a rashly venturesome business altogether, I nevertheless got into that motor car of his and with great trepidation watched him crank it up. He then clambered up into the driver's seat and away we went, along the pleasant country roads, where the way-side flowers were all blossoming into rich and glorious life.

'We had travelled along in this fashion for some time, when my companion all of a sudden let go of the steering-wheel and shouted, "Look out! Jump for it!" Hardly had the warning left his lips ere the motor crashed into some obstacle – apparently a brick wall – and I was flung out on to the grass.

'I looked up at the man bending over me, and instantly recognised

him as a friend of mine who some years previously had suddenly left his residence, without offering an explanation of the odour of dead bodies proceeding from his cellar. He had soon afterwards been tried, found guilty and hanged.

'"Are you in pain?" he now asked.

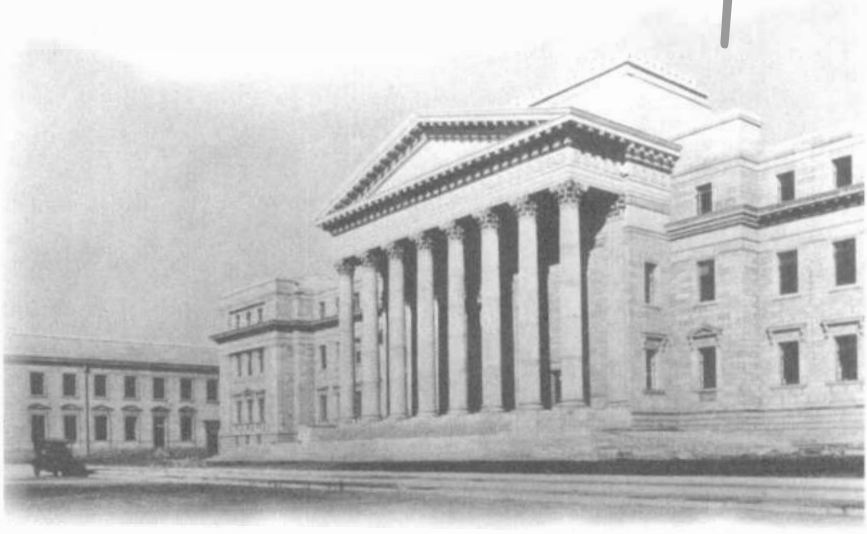
'I gazed at him in some amazement. I wondered if by some miracle he had cheated the gallows after all. "But – but you are dead!" I ejaculated.

'He smiled. It was the same guileless, joyous smile which he had bestowed upon the judge on the morning of his trial.

'"So are you," he said.'

BEN EATH

The University of the Witwatersrand Student Magazine: The Umpa



From 1923 to 1925, Bosman attended the University of the Witwatersrand and the Johannesburg Normal College which were jointly responsible for his training as a teacher. During this time and at the start of 1926, he published three brief prose works in *The University of the Witwatersrand Student Magazine: The Umpa:* a critical commentary, a playlet and a biographical sketch.[1] The diverse nature of these indicates that, within a short space, he had become comfortable with writing in a range of literary genres.

The first of the items, a discussion of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, gives an immediate indication of the strides made by the young writer in response to his attendance at university, even though he was frequently less than complimentary about academics.[2] The head of the Department of English, Professor Max Drennan, thought it 'the finest essay' he had 'ever read', Blignaut reports, and its effect on Blignaut himself was so enduring that, in Canterbury many years later, he could still remember 'Herman's words, beautiful as evensong, at the altar where Thomas A'Beckett' fell: 'I had seen before me a great essay, behind it a genius' (1981:38 and 20).

The beauty which affected Blignaut in this way stems from the elegant prose which I have elsewhere described as mellifluous and seductive – so much so that defects in the argument may go unnoticed, as seems to be the case with Professor Drennan's response. Despite Bosman's own partiality to irony, he surprisingly fails to detect the weight of Chaucer's in the portrait of the Prioress who, notwithstanding a vow of poverty, extravagantly feeds her small dogs on costly fare. While acknowledging that she does so 'at a time when gaunt famine stalked abroad', Bosman is more concerned with her kindness to God's small creatures. Likewise, he does not single out figures like the Summoner and the Pardoner as deservedly attracting Chaucer's bitter satire but sees the pilgrims without exception as 'essentially human and essentially lovable'. Nonetheless, Bosman, as a young student, is perceptive in his recognition of the work's relevance to all human life. More especially, he is able to discern, in *The Canterbury Tales*, the uniqueness of Chaucer's creation and, even if the essay fails to show full awareness of the complexities of *The General Prologue*, he rightly celebrates its greatness.

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1 *The last of these contributions, 'A Teacher in the Bushveld', was published in* The Umpa *when Bosman was first employed. It appears in Appendix I.*

2 *An unsigned article entitled 'University Professors who talk Tripe', which was published in Blignaut and Bosman's* The New Sjambok *of 18 July 1931, has with good reason been attributed to Bosman by Gray (1986:187).*

Professor Max Drennan, head of the Department of English when Bosman was a student at the University of the Witwatersrand

The University of the Witwatersrand during the nineteen-twenties

In contrast to the felicitous diction encountered in Bosman's appraisal of Chaucer's writing, *The Urge of the Primordial* is a bitingly satirical piece which focuses on the racial prejudice that characterized the colonial occupation of Africa and, therefore, of Bosman's own country. There are four characters in this brief work, which opens to reveal the missionary, James Kellaway, and the educationist, Professor Holzgene, in the boardroom of the Society for Elevating the African. The word 'holz' is German for 'wood', significantly implying something wooden in the educationist's genetic composition. This is only one pointer to the obvious contempt Bosman has for the arrogance of assumptions that the African requires upliftment. Also in the cast is De Carle whose unwillingness to 'shake hands with a nigger' points to prevailing racial attitudes. He represents the South African public whose attitude to and treatment of black people is held up to scrutiny in the play. Bosman highlights this not only in his exposure of the generally held belief that all blacks are thieves (as indicated in the matter of the missing cutlery) but more especially in the white man's unashamed acknowledgment that he is 'here for the express purpose of exploiting the native', that 'our civilization in this country' is 'based upon his toil'.

In colonial terms, 'the negro is regarded as something peculiar ... to be studied like the amoeba under a microscope'. These words belong to Francis Chamberlain Clements, the Zulu protégé of Kellaway and Holzgene who have renamed him, obviously with a Christian saint and (ironically, in view of his political leanings)[3] with the British foreign minister in mind. Kellaway and Holzgene congratulate themselves on successfully civilizing this African man, so that he is and has remained, 'for more than a decade', 'as highly developed' as they. Conscious of 'the stigma' he carries because he has a black skin, however, Clements is aware that he has not been accepted by the white man: 'it should not be a question of tolerating a man in spite of the fact that he is a negro', the Zulu contends. 'It should be a matter of not caring in the slightest degree what his colour is'. As is typical of Bosman's writing, the play ends with a surprising revelation. The white man's failure to accept Clements means that he must ultimately affirm his identity elsewhere. In the face of a charge that he is a M'shangaan, he relinquishes his European clothing, donning a blanket and taking up an assegai to assert his self-respect as a Zulu.

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3 *Joseph Chamberlain himself chose his appointment to the colonial office. See Thomas Pakenham,* The Scramble for Africa *(1992:487–488).*

In spite of his contemptuous appraisal of South African whites, Bosman ends his play with a suggestion that the African is unable to live indefinitely in the condition imposed upon him by the likes of Kellaway and Holzgene but returns to his natural state. Blignaut (1981:171) writes that the idea informing Bosman's play, 'called *The Primordial Urge*' [sic], is 'the possibility' that 'when the trappings of civilisation were too hastily grafted on a stone-aged mind, the barbarian instincts were not buried deep enough under the veneer of ersatz evolution to prevent an atavistic exhumation in an emotive crisis'. According to Blignaut, Clements's reaction is induced by the news that 'a woman of his tribe is to be tried for infanticide, because she has smothered her twins at birth according to tribal custom' (1981:172). Although Blignaut's recollection of the play's conclusion differs from the version in *The Umpa*, there is in both, according to the late Western view, a regression of some kind. Perhaps Bosman's stand will be clearer if we return to Blignaut's discussion:

> A lively controversy raged in South Africa, during the twenties and thirties, whether the black man should have Western civilisation imposed on him, or be left unhindered to develop along his own lines. Herman and I stood on a broad road that was not a line of demarcation but a means of access to both courses. Tribal influences should be preserved against the white huckster's sophistry that gadgets were the firstlings of progress and the witch-doctor's wild incantations were mouthings that woke savage echoes from the dark forests, those heathen temples. The white man's offerings should be to hand, we said, on the other side of the road for free traffic, when they lost their wonder and awe. Should our morality and religion be in the forefront of the display? We thought not. (1981:89)

Clearly, Bosman viewed the African peoples' deficiencies in Western civilization as stemming from a lack of exposure to it. His views, as expressed here, are a reinforcement of Sach's claim that Bosman harboured no racial prejudice.

Highlighting the beneficial effect of the term at Witwatersrand University, the elegance of diction in Bosman's final 'juvenile' works surpasses anything he wrote while at school. Notwithstanding the obvious and comprehensible immaturity in the early writings, however, all of them are significant for what they reveal of their writer's creative potential and of

techniques and attitudes that would recur – with modifications, of course – in the work for which he is better known. Unfortunately, a number of years would intervene before the young Bosman was to take up his pen again. It was the rifle he acquired when initially teaching in the Marico, and which he took to Johannesburg to show his family during his first break from school, that would be the means for the arbitrary act that killed his step-brother and sent Bosman to prison.[4] Obviously excluding him from his chosen profession when he emerged from Pretoria Central in 1930, this disaster changed his career-path, thereby conferring on South Africa one of its best-loved men of letters.

4 *After the judge had pronounced sentence at the close of the trial, Bosman requested to make a statement, during which he described the shooting as 'impelled by some wild and chaotic impulse, in which there was no suggestion of malice or premeditation' (Rosenberg 1981b:55).*

THE UMPA

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND.

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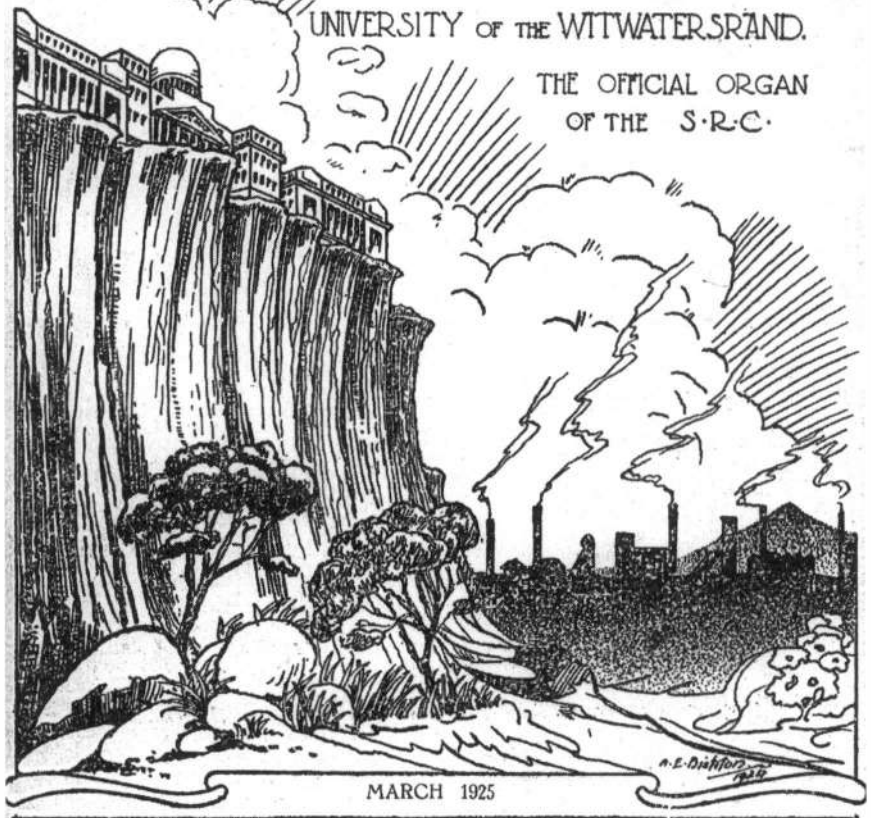

MARCH 1925

DIE STUDENTEBLAD VAN DIE
UNIWERSITEIT VAN DIE WITWATERSRAND.
DIE OFFISIEËLE ORGAAN VAN DIE STUDENTERAAD.

The Canterbury Tales

Thirty pilgrims riding forth into the dawn!

This is the frame-work round which Chaucer has woven those wonderful tales, which are still as fresh as ever and reach clear to the reader's heart across five weary centuries. It is strange to think that the young squire's embroidered gown has been faded these many long years; it is strange to reflect that the 'Good Wif of biside Bathe,' the Nun, the Friar, the 'Doctor of Physic' and the Merchant all lived and died in those far-off days when men still thought of their religion as something worth fighting for, and—for this was long before the advent of the modern woman—when women were content to be considered merely 'beautiful and good'; but this is the strangest thought of all, that the hand which created these humanity-breathing pilgrims lies mingled with the dust of that historic past.

What Chaucer's secret is, and how he has managed to infuse into his work that spirit of vitality, I do not pretend to know; but I do know that these people whose inmost soul he has laid bare in his gently ironic way are living men and women; they are not paragons of virtue, certainly, but with all their shams and hypocrisies, their frailties and foibles, they are essentially human and essentially lovable. We have the Nun, whose love for God's lower creatures runs to the extent of feeding her

> 'Smale houndes
> With rosted Flessh, or milk and wastel bread'
>
> at a time when gaunt famine stalked abroad.

There is the Merchant who, according to his own account, is engaged in huge business transactions and 'so wet his wit bisette, ther wist not wight he was in dette.' Then comes the Poor Parson, and we suddenly find ourselves face to face with sublimity. For we have here a man who is ardently sincere, whose prayers are not mere lip-service, and whose passionate soul is not content to deal merely in theories and abstractions, but

> 'Cristes loore and his Apostles twelve
> He taught, and first he folwed it himselve.'

There is, perhaps, in the poetic simplicity of the 'Prologue' nothing that can approach the haunting splendour of some of Vergil's pathetic half-lines, or that can compare with Shakespeare's thunderous magnificence. Yet ever and again we find, scattered throughout the piece, some startlingly vivid descriptive passage which is equal to anything in the literature of the world. That line, for instance, depicting a sailor on horseback,

'He rood upon a rouncey as he kouthe'

is as unforgettable as the last touch which Chaucer puts to the portrait of the Miller:

'His mouth as wide was as a greet forneys.'

Thus, when the 'Prologue' ends, it is with a feeling of regret that we bid farewell to these pilgrims and leave them to travel eastwards. It is a pretty scene, this last one, although it possesses a gentle sadness all its own; for it is symbolic of this life of ours, of which every day is but a further stage of our journey into the vast unknown.

H.C. Bosman

"The Umpa."

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CONTENTS:

The Urge of the Primordial

Scene I.

Scene: The combined office and board-room of the Society for Elevating the African. There is a door on the right, a table with writing materials, registers and minute-books, and about half-a-dozen chairs. On the wall there is a bannerette with the inscription 'Education and Civilization for All.'

Professor Holzgene and James Kellaway, missionary, are seated at the table, while De Carle occupies a chair a little distance off.

De Carle: Well, I must be going now. This Francis Chamberlain Clements of yours may be all you claim for him, but I can't stay to see.

Holzgene: I'm sure you'd be glad to make his acquaintance. And so would he.

De Carle: I don't know so much; I simply can't reconcile myself to the idea of having to shake hands with a nigger. My whole soul revolts against it.

Kellaway: So did mine until my eyes were opened, praised be the Lord. Now —

De Carle: Now you fling your arms about his neck and call him brother.

Kellaway (not seeing the sarcasm, his eyes gleaming with a fanatic light): Yes, thanks be to —

De Carle: Anyway, I think I'd rather be a free savage than go about with a thin veneer of pseudo-civilization.

Holzgene: I used to think the same.

Kellaway: So did I.

Holzgene: Even now I find the restrictions of civilization hateful. You can almost hear the chains clank. But we have definitely raised Clements from the primordial stage of development in which we found him. He is now as highly developed as any of us. And his civilization has stood the test for more than a decade. He has made speeches and been howled down and had bottles flung at him. Yet through it all he has remained calm and dignified and a gentleman.

De Carle: That so?

Holzgene: We have entertained him at banquets, and when some of the

spoons were missing and they blamed him for it, he was far more grieved than angry.

De Carle: But why do you display all this interest in the niggers?

Holzgene: Are we not here for the express purpose of exploiting the native? Is our civilization in this country not based upon his toil?

De Carle: Then what do you want to educate him for? If you educate him, Jim Fish, instead of going about his work with his wonted docility, will haul out a Communist pamphlet and start arguing about Karl Marx's Theory of Value, and that is undesirable. While we have the nigger down it is our duty to keep him down, and if necessary, let us hit him with a pick-handle.

Kellaway: Oh, but that is not right. That is not Christian. As the Good Book says —

De Carle: It's a question of racial dominance.

Holzgene (excitedly) : If there is such a thing as racial dominance, I don't want it. It has been achieved by the blood and sweat of slaves.

De Carle (with feigned interest): How's that?

Holzgene: Western supremacy, I suppose, was established by the Battle of Actium. And who won it?

De Carle (suppressing a yawn): Who, indeed?

Holzgene: Read 'La Victoire' of Pierre Mille. He tells you there. He says Actium was won by the galley-slaves, rowing in chains in the holds, amid the stench of bilge-water and the smell of blood, amid the vermin and the lashes. They won it. And as far as I know, the only intimation they ever received of their victory was when they arrived at Alexandria, and the crowds strewed roses over the decks of the galleys, and a few rose-petals fell down beneath upon bare and bleeding shoulders.

Kellaway: Roses, did you say? Ah, roses! Roses have thorns, like the thorns in the crown of Christ. . .The martyrdom of Man!

De Carle: Very interesting. But I really must go now.

Holzgene: No, it's not interesting. The whole damn thing is steeped in shame and it's sickening. And I think the less we hear about racial dominance, the better – the better for both the victors and the vanquished.

De Carle: Quite. I am now going home to read old Pierre Milly. I want to find out who won the Battle of Blood River. (He leaves).

Holzgene: It's about time Clements showed up, isn't it?

Kellaway: Yes. Don't you think Clements is wonderful? Don't you think

that in spite of all that De Carle says about it, he's splendid? Isn't he a tribute to our educational work?

Holzgene: It shows — (a knock is heard at the door). [Enter Francis Chamberlain Clements. He is a big, full-blooded Zulu, elegantly dressed and with an American education. They all shake hands.]

Kellaway: Take a seat, brother, take a seat.

Holzgene: You look rather worried. What's wrong? Have you been kicked off the pavement again?

Clements: I have just been thinking of the grave difficulties confronting us.

Holzgene (sententiously): Oh, yes, but prejudice, after all, is only based on ignorance, you know, and we are overcoming it. We are overcoming it.

Clements: It's not that so much. Look at my own case. Even amongst friends my position is invidious. I have heard some people state that the negro is the equal of the white man: I have heard others prove in the same dogmatic way that he is superior.

Holzgene: Well, what of that?

Clements: Don't you see? The unconscious prejudice remains. The stigma is still there. The negro is regarded as something peculiar, something to be studied like the amoeba under a microscope. It should not be a question of tolerating a man in spite of the fact that he is a negro. It should be a matter of not caring in the slightest degree what his colour is.

Kellaway (not comprehending): Yes, I see. However, let's start work.

[They get round the table, open the books and proceed to business.]

Scene II.

Scene: The front veranda of Professor Holzgene's residence. Professor Holzgene and John Kellaway are reclining in deck-chairs.

Holzgene: What time did you say Clements would be here for dinner?

Kellaway: Half-past six.

Holzgene (consulting his watch): Oh, well, he won't be much longer now. You know, Kel, whenever I grow despondent about our work – as I sometimes do – I just think about Clements and it really makes me feel ashamed of myself. To think what insults and indignities he has endured , to think what supreme tests he has been put through – and every time he has triumphed.

Kellaway: It's Christian, that's what it is.

Holzgene: Yes, I suppose you're right. Nevertheless, it makes me wonder what a white man, a civilized white man, would have done under similar circumstances, and I don't mind telling you that I doubt very much as to whether that white man would have risen to the same heights of sublimity as Clements has done.

Kellaway: Hark! I heard the gate bang. That must be Clements.

Holzgene: So like him, isn't it? Always punctual.

(Enter De Carle, wildly excited.)

De Carle (to Holzgene): That's what I have been telling you all along. Ever since the first missionaries landed on these shores, our relations with the natives have been jeopardised by a gang of Bible-thumping crooks. Do you hear me? By a lot of reptiles who haven't got blood in their veins, but a mixture of microbes and dish-water.

Holzgene: For heaven's sake try to keep calm. What's all this trouble about?

Kellaway: Why hasn't Clements come yet, do you know?

De Carle: Ha, ha. That's rich, that's really exquisite. Why hasn't Clements come? I'll tell you why he hasn't come. He's in gaol.

Holzgene:
Kellaway: } What!

De Carle: He was walking down Eloff Street this afternoon —

Holzgene:
Kellaway: } Yes, yes. Get a move on!

De Carle: — when somebody called him a M'shangaan. Now, a European wouldn't resent that word very much, but of course a nigger's mind flows along —

Holzgene: Oh, leave that out. Quick, what happened?

De Carle: Well, he dashed home, took off his clothes, dressed himself in a blanket and went back brandishing a knob-kerrie. He shouted out that no Zulu would allow himself to be called a M'shangaan. He then assaulted a policeman and got gaoled.

Kellaway: Well I never. I don't – I don't suppose Clements is a M'shangaan, is he?

Holzgene says nothing. He sits bent forward, his face buried in his hands, and

The Curtain Falls.

H.C.B.

Appendix I

(The following material does not wholly accord with the aim of this collection: although published in The Umpa, *'A Teacher in the Bushveld' was written when the author first took up employment and cannot strictly be classed as* juvenilia.*)*

* * *

The piece of writing recorded below was prompted by Bosman's appointment, at the beginning of 1926, to his first teaching post in the rural Marico area. Sachs, who was trained with him at the Normal College and at the University of the Witwatersrand, writes that because of their youthful and often troublesome exuberance, the principal 'got his own back' on them. When they qualified as teachers, they were 'sent into the Bundu', where they could do 'least damage' (1971:29). As the opening of 'A Teacher in the Bushveld' suggests, Bosman heartily agreed, humorously rejoicing in the fact that he had taken only the 'Three Year' and not the 'Four Year Course', because the higher qualification might have sent him even further afield.

In this text, Bosman's careless support of the racial stereotype, when seeking a lighthearted laugh at the expense of one of his black fellows, may appear to contend with both Sach's claim that his friend entertained no racial prejudice and the like impression conveyed in 'The Urge of the Primordial'. Here, 'a noble Matabele' has supposedly disappeared with 'an appreciable quantity' of the young teacher's luggage. In describing the farmers' negligent attitudes to snakes, however – they 'put their hands into dark tool-cupboards without getting a nigger to put his hand in first' (8) – this autobiographical sketch anticipates stories like 'Makapan's Caves' where Oom Schalk derisively undermines a view that blacks are inferior and, therefore, of no consequence.[1]

1 *That Bosman sees this view as both absurd and wrong is highlighted in later tales such as 'Unto Dust' and 'Makapan's Caves'.*

An examination of the sketch is rewarding not only because it hints at the way in which Bosman would later write about the Marico and its people but also because stories such as 'Brown Mamba' seem to have their genesis here. More important, perhaps, it anticipates the mature writer in its incorporation of significant tonal and stylistic diversity under a single heading. As in the references to the chalk-stained jacket of the newly arrived teacher and to the extraordinary effect of his ploy concerning a rifle-shot, there is abundant testimony to the characteristic humour and the extravagant absurdity. Nor is the reader denied Bosman's typical irony, which extends at times to satire. At the close, however, all of these surprisingly yield to the kind of romantic lyricism that will distinguish tales like 'The Veld Maiden'.

A Teacher in the Bushveld

A teacher's post having been assigned to me, I packed up and left — for the Crocodile River. After I had passed Matric and had completed the Three Year Course at the Johannesburg Training College, they sent me into the Marico Bushveld. I'm glad I didn't take the Four Year Course, though, because with a full T2 and a B.A. I might have been thrown clean across the border: into Moçambique, perhaps, or else the Nubian Desert.

My new environment, when I got to it, was somewhat strange. For one thing, there was so much of it. When the ox-waggon which had brought me thus far had gone back again, leaving my luggage and myself in the middle of a young forest, I stood for a few moments, looking first at the scenery stretching away on the right side of the road and then taking a gaze at what was spread on the left side, trying to make up my mind as to which of the two views I detested the most.

I had almost decided in favour of the left, when an old, bearded Dutchman came past in a donkey-cart. He didn't waste much time in coming to the point, either. He merely asked me my name, what salary I drew, whether Johannesburg was much bigger than Koster, what major subjects I was taking for degree purposes, and how I liked the Bushveld. Then, as it was getting on towards sunset, he told me the news. The people at whose place I was to board were still away at Zeerust for the Communion service. That was all.

Only one course remained open to me – to camp out in the school-building.

I therefore hired a nigger to help me carry my belongings to the school. He wasn't an ordinary nigger, either. I could see by his erect carriage and his dauntless mien that he was one of the noble Matabele whose forbears had died, assegai in hand, in defence of their country's freedom. We got to the building at last, and I got inside. When I came out again, about ten minutes later, I found that the noble Matabele had gone, together with an appreciable quantity of luggage.

A bed was easily put together. I merely laid two black-boards across desks and then slept on top of them, spreading my blankets over me. This arrangement answered admirably. There was, however, one slight inconvenience attached to it. As I had gone to sleep with my clothes on, and, furthermore, as I had neglected to clean the blackboard first, I went about for the next three weeks with part of the geography of Asia and all of the three times table clearly legible on the back of my jacket.

Such was the nature of my introduction to the Bushveld. After these preliminary discomforts, however, I got used to things. I started boarding on my own, too, and have been getting on first-rate ever since.

The people around here were quite friendly, and somewhat inclined to treat me as an equal. For, after all, I was only a school-teacher. Then, suddenly, I noticed a change in their attitude. They became deferential to the point of shameless adulation, and I couldn't make it out at all. But when one morning the local predikant, in passing, raised his hat to me, I thought it about time I enquired into things. And I found out the reason for this sudden access of respect on their part. They thought I was eking out my teaching salary by gun-running. And when a man is once known to be a professional gun-runner, he has reached almost to the top of Marico's social ladder. In fact, there are only two classes of men for whom the Bushvelders have a greater respect – brandy-smugglers and dukes. I don't pretend to know who the man is who started that gun-running rumour, but whoever he may be, I am deeply and eternally grateful to him, and I can only hope that some day I may be able to do him a similar good turn.

There is one thing I don't like about Marico, and that is snakes. There are no fewer than eight species, of which all are equally slimy and low-down and venomous; and if ever you are bitten by one and they don't apply antidotes immediately, there's only half-an-hour between you and the funeral parlour. There is less, even, if the undertaker is at all quick about it. Yet the farmers are incredibly callous in this matter. They leave their doors open at night; they lie down just anywhere in the long grass; and they even put their hands into dark tool-cupboards without getting a nigger to put his hand in first. Such carelessness is deplorable. One man, indeed, was actually bitten by a snake while in bed. He merely pulled off the reptile, cauterized the wound a bit to let some blood out,[2] and then calmly turned over and went to sleep once more. Next morning he was quite well. This story may, on first sight, seem not altogether worthy of credence. Yet there is no doubt that this incident took place exactly as described, – the bed is still there.

There is a very big man around here. He's the tallest man I have ever seen. He is so tall, in fact, that when I am near him and want to speak to him, I have first to take out my collar-stud, because otherwise, when I raise my head to look up at him, the stud presses so heavily on my throat that I get choked. Well, this man is as elevated morally as he is physically, and it is a current belief that he has never told an untruth in his life.

On one occasion, however, he succumbed to temptation – and in this way. I was out shooting with him and, for practice, I fired twice at a small white rock about twenty yards away, and the two bullets landed pretty near the centre, lodging within a few inches of one another. I was immensely proud of this, and only regretted that instead of twenty I wasn't two hundred yards off. Suddenly the sight of this great and holy man towering above me gave me an idea. And it seemed a good idea. Anyway, after about an hour's discussion, and after I handed over fifteen shillings in cash, as well as my wrist-watch and shirt, he agreed to my proposal. He was to say that he was present when I fired those shots, and that I was then standing at the foot of a kopje about thirteen hundred yards away.

So much for the plot. It was so trivial in itself that I would not have troubled to mention it, save for its somewhat astonishing sequel. We

2 *Bosman is incorrect here. Cauterization would have sealed the wound rather than cause the blood to flow.*

strolled on homewards, and, coming across the owner of the farm – who attributed my shirtless condition to an attempt at keeping cool during the prevailing heat-wave – we casually informed him about the shooting. Frankly incredulous, he nevertheless jumped on to his horse and rode off. Four hours later we found him leaning up against the stone and murmuring through his tears something about 'the finest shooting in Africa.' The news travelled apace. People came from miles around to view the spot, worship it in their quiet way, and depart. Still the stream of tourists continued. The proprietor, to save the stone from mutilation, erected a five-foot palisade around it, but that deterred nobody. They merely broke off portions of the wooden fence for mementoes and carved their initials on the palings. The last I heard of the matter was that, to accommodate the tourist swarm, the owner of the farm had built a five-storey hotel, which was paying handsomely. Where before there was nothing but veld and bush and kopje, a flourishing village is now springing up. The government has extended the railway-line into the Bushveld. The Rand mines are suffering from a shortage of native labour, due to the presence here of a few thousand mine niggers, who are engaged in lugging about the tourists' baggage between station and hotel. And finally, if this rapid progress continues, this new village will, in the course of a year or two, completely overshadow Johannesburg's own mushroom growth .... I am almost sorry, now, that I didn't fire three bullets into that rock.

Life here is, on the whole, rather uncongenial and devoid of anything that is intellectually stimulating. In the full light of day this is an ugly and even repelling region. It is only after sunset that the place becomes invested with a certain modified lure and enchantment. For, sometimes, at night, when the world is very still, a soft wind comes sweeping across the veld.[3] Then, if you are outside, and listen very carefully, you can hear the story it has to tell. It is thoughtful, this little wind, and the tale it tells, as old as the world and as time-worn, has about it something that is yet new and sweet and strangely stirring. And this story is one that we all love to hear, for, steeped as it is in the fragrance of some romance of long ago, it awakens memories of far-off things – of trees that are dark in the moonlight, of crumbling garden-walls, of star-dust and of roses. Then the little wind grows rather wistful, because the last pages of its story are sad. The ending has to be mournful, of course. Either Tristan, returning after seven

3 *This is one of Bosman's favourite images and is employed in a great many of his later stories. See, too, 'The Wind that Bloweth ...' in Blignaut (1981:59–63).*

lonely years and finding his Iseult false and in the arms of another, rides away broken-hearted into the west – to die. Or else Iseult gazes wearily and with tear-dimmed eyes across the plains for him who cometh not; gradually the crimson fades from her cheeks, the cyclamen from her lips, and in the early autumn, just when the first brown leaves are beginning to flutter to earth, she too breathes her last. Oh yes, the ending must be sad. All these old tales are that way, and the little wind, knowing it, perhaps, and heaving a tired sigh, sinks quietly to rest.

H.C.B.

Appendix II

The story reproduced below was not submitted under either of Bosman's usual pseudonyms. I record it because, *inter alia*, 'Safrica' bears some resemblance to 'Ben Africa', which according to Gray (1986:3) was one of Bosman's *Sunday Times* pen-names. (See, however, my findings as discussed in the introduction to the section on the *Sunday Times* contributions.) The diction in this item by Safrica is bland and devoid of the register we have come to expect even from the early Bosman, who grew in experience during his year-long association with the newspaper. This unimaginative tale appears along with a more characteristic one published by Ben Eath on the same date as Bosman's submissions to the *Sunday Times* terminated, namely 30 July 1922. 'Dreams' features a sardonic comment on the late arrival of a train (it 'was only three hours late – luckily') and does have a surprise ending, both of which may suggest either Bosman's authorship or that another contributor was inspired by these aspects of Ben Eath's writing. I favour this last possibility. This is not the only *Sunday Times* tale by 'Safrica' but I include one example for the reader's consideration.

Dreams

Jessie was rather interested in Jim. I cannot say if Jim was interested in Jessie, but I don't think so.

Jim had gone away from Kraaifontein rather suddenly. He hadn't even said goodbye to Jessie. Her people told her to forget him, but she could not. She was sure he would come back to her some day. She often lay awake at night thinking of him and wondering what he was doing.

Then one Saturday night she dreamt about him. The dream was a vivid one. She saw him descend from the mail train. She saw everything distinctly. It was the first-class coach. It was 105,677. Something told her this happened on a Tuesday.

On Sunday morning she was all excitement. She had not been so happy since Jim had gone away.

That night she had a similar dream, and on Monday night it was repeated.

She was sure Jim would arrive then. He had always been impetuous, and if he did decide to go home he would let nobody know.

That night she went to the station. She knew he would be glad to find at least one person to meet him.

The train was only three hours late – luckily – but it seemed she waited days before it arrived.

She could hardly stand still when it came in. She had never been so excited in her life.

As the train passed her she looked at the coach behind the saloon. It was a first-class coach and the number was 105,677.

She put her hand to her heart as the engine pulled up.

There was only one passenger, and he alighted from the only coach she had eyes for. He looked like Jim from behind. She could have sworn it was Jim.

She heard a voice say, 'so long, Jim. Good luck!'

She ran forward. She could see nothing but him. Jim had come home!

She was a few paces from Jim when he turned and faced her – but it wasn't her Jim!

SAFRICA

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1 *All of Bosman's* Sunday Times *stories are on unnumbered supplementary pages.*

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1 Submitted for publication before the current volume was conceived, this article shares some of the insights conveyed here.