

Robben Island Isal,  
Robben Island.

25th November, 1964.

Dear Mrs Magwood,

Thank you for the sprayer and the powder which I received last week. I felt quite the progressive farmer as I moved round the garden spraying plants without fear or favour.

Thank you also for your most interesting letter. It was a bit cruel on Nixon, but I found the incident very amusing. After all, Nixon is an outstanding U.S. politician: and for him to be so effectively silenced by a negro boy - from Alabama, at that!

Your references to the snobbery that attached to Nederlands in the olden days reminds me of our coloured preachers at Graaff-Reinet. The African and Coloured people constitute one congregation, in all denominations, so that services are conducted in both Xhosa and Afrikaans. In those days, the Whites, the Methodist Church seemed to believe that a preacher was a more reliable agent of God if he was uneducated.

The emphasis was on the "indwelling spirit". The result was that most of our preachers, African and Coloured, were barely literate. However, it was an unquestioned convention in those days that a preacher just could not see or read if he did not have his glasses on. And as most of them were labourers who had to change into their Sunday best, it wasn't unusual for them to find they had left their glasses behind.

But, and this is what all this nonsense is leading up to, they had to create the impression that they could read. It was very important in those days to be thought able to read. Those of our Coloured preachers who could read, enjoyed their "zekerem tot hem". One old man, who couldn't read, would invariably ask his congregation to sing "gesang 256 in die Mathosa taal" - for a very long time it was kaffirstal while the name used for the Coloured people by the Koss was as barbaric as the chicks it contained - "enke in Hollands:-

Dag die wonderden, dag die oordeel en al wat daer op volg". And they would bring the roof down. In got was

understood to be very indulgent. Some sinners had been known to go to heaven because they had used their musical talents for the glory of God. And musical talent meant lung-power, that's all.

Oh, but they were an imaginative lot! Here's one preaching on the "Fall of Man", painting a picture of God calling "Adam! Adam!" and Adam replying from the dark recesses of some thick bush, "here am I". God then asks him if he has eaten of the fruit and he replies "It is this woman you gave me". God ignores the implied accusation, passes on to Eve and she blames the snake. "God looked it up and down as it stood there in arrogant defiance. 'It's these blinking legs that give you ideas', says God, and with that 'whish', he cut off the legs and flat on its belly fell the snake." This, mind you, is given in onomatopoeic language, with appropriate gestures - faithfully reproduced by the interpreter - and when the snake falls "binka", explosive consonants and clicks and gestures convey most vividly the precipitate prostration of the original snake.

I am sorry for this digression. Now for

business. You ask what plays I should like to have. I have enjoyed Arnold Wesker's, Lessing's and Osborne's plays. Eugene O'Neill is, of course, outstanding. You sent me three plays of his: "Oh, Wilderness!", "The Hairy Ape" and "All God's Children Got Wings". As I said in my last letter, these people tend to be a movement, a school, rather than individual playwrights, so that the work of one is the work of all. I shall have to except O'Neill and Brendan Behan whose works really stand apart from the rest. In short, then, Mrs Macquard, except for O'Neill and Behan I have no strong preferences. I am quite willing to have you guide my reading!

I am sorry, really, if I have not thanked you for "The New Yorker" in the past. It contains some interesting articles - for light reading and relaxation. I enjoyed it.

My wife will be leaving Joburg on the 29th December and on the 5th (fifth) December, I'll be celebrating my fortieth birthday - entering into manhood!

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely, Richard -

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