side of the embankment while the goods train wheezed and puffed up the grade, its headlamp cutting a big yellow hole in the dark. We ducked back out of sight as the locomotive went by, hissing and rumbling. The tender followed, then a couple of boxcars, then some coal cars and a flatcar, another boxcar. The locomotive was out of sight.

"Here it is," Chinaboy said, pushing the boy ahead. We stood near the train, hearing it click-clack past. "Take this coal box coming up," Chinaboy instructed. "She's slow. And good luck, pal!"

The coal car came up and Whitey moved out, watching the iron grip on the far end of it. Then as it drew slowly level with him, he reached out, grabbed and hung on, then got a foothold, moving away from us slowly.

We watched him hanging there, reaching for the edge of the car and hauling himself up. Watching the train clicking away, we saw him straddling the edge of the truck, his hand raised in a salute. We raised our hands too.

"Why ain't the band playing? Hell!" Chinaboy said.

The Tax Dodger

Cameron Duodu

Poet and novelist Cameron Duodu was born in Ghana in 1937. From 1960 to 1965 he was editor of the Ghanaian edition of *Drum*, and he has been for several years the Ghanaian correspondent for *The Observer* and director of the Ghana News Agency. Besides travelling extensively throughout Europe, Mr. Duodu has spent several months in the United States, and in 1967 published his first novel, *The Gab Boys*. "The Tax Dodger" first appeared in *Okyeame*, published by the Ghana Society of Writers.

I looked round the Court House. I couldn't believe I was on trial. Why, the court looked much the same as it did these countless times when I and other boys came to sit there not because we were interested in how our native customary law worked but because we got our laughs free and we loved fun.

I remembered, for instance, that man who had been brought in for stealing a bag of cocoa. After the prosecuting policeman had outlined the case against him, he was asked to state why he said he was "Not Guilty."

"My Lords, Panel Members, I am an Ewe from Togoland who came to this Golcos to work only last year."

(We laughed at this because a year after Independence, there he stood still calling Ghana his good old "Golcos.")

"The man who employed me," he went on, "also employed two of his own countrymen. I know their names

and if the court likes, it can ask them whether what I am saying is true or not. One is Yaw Mensah and the other Kwadwo Darko. That Kwadwo Darko is a good man. Whenever he and I meet on our master's cocoa farm, he talks to me nicely as if I belong to his own tribe and asks me whether my dogs have caught any rats. If I say yes, he gives me a shilling and takes some of the rats. Also whenever I get snails, I give them to him for we Ewes don't eat snails like you Twi people."

By this time, we had laughed so much that the illiterate police constable on duty had shouted "WORLER! WORLER!" quite often and even his thick bulldog voice was getting hoarse and beginning to sound a trifle like a girl's treble. Yet, there was no "order" in the courtroom for each time he said "WORLER!" Our laughter was given fresh impetus as he kept on shouting "WORLER!" all the more, not the least bit aware that there was anything wrong with it. And so it went on like a merry-go-round.

The court chairman was a merry old man with a great sense of humor and he didn't worry us much except for an occasional thump he made with his fist on the table. But even he was getting impatient with the man in the dock.

"My friend," he said, "it's all very good of you to tell the court about your friend Kwadwo Darko and his love for snails, or rather, rats!" . . . (laughter) . . . "But I must warn you that the charge against you is a serious one and that you'd better confine yourself to answering it. You mentioned Kwadwo Darko's name only because you said he was one of two people who could bear out what you were going to tell us which you never did. For all I know, you will be telling us next about the way Kwadwo Darko sharpens his cutlass before he goes to his farm . . ." (laughter) . . . "Now, I think it will be a good idea, don't you, if you left your good friend Kwadwo Darko for a bit and told us what you were going to say?"

"Yes, sir!" the man, Yaovi, replied. "I was going to say we do much the same amount of work—myself, Yaw Mensah and Kwadwo Darko. But they get better terms than me; they get the 'abusa' deal by which a third of the gross income that is obtained from the cocoa they tend is given to them. I am only paid a wage of two shillings and sixpence a day, with only a variable bonus to add when the cocoa season comes and my cocoa is sold. So that I can't save as much money as I'd like to save with which to buy a bicycle and go to Togoland . . ."

We really held our sides now. That man must have been a really bush Ewe for no Ewe man who lived in an Akyem town steeped in irrational tribalism such as ours could have lain himself open like that, admitting to a court full of antagonistic Akyem people that a bicycle is one of the most treasured things in Togoland and that if he could get one to take home, he would feel like a Moslem who had been to Mecca! You see, this was a standing joke tribalistic Akyems made at the expense of Ewes and which the latter vehemently refuted.

The man in the dock was quite puzzled by our laughter but went on, not too shaken. "This season, I decided I'd do something to right matters in my favor and when I cut up the fresh cocoa pods, I put some of the beans in a bag and took them to a place away from where I had made my main heap of cocoa beans. But Yaw Mensah saw it and because last time when he asked me for matches, I said I didn't have any and then he saw one drop from my pocket when I was taking out a piece of cola nut to chew, he went and told our master who came and reported me to the police who put handcuffs to my hands . . ."

"But my good friend," said the chairman of the court, "you have as much as admitted the charges against you. Why then do you say you're not guilty?"

"I am not guilty because I wasn't caught by anybody when I was taking the cocoa bag to the place I hid it,"

the man said, getting heated. "It is the law, isn't it, that when you're caught stealing, they bring you to court? In Togoland, the French people, when they catch you, they beat you with sticks and you are put in chains and if you're not lucky enough, you will even be shot. That's why we have a proverb which says 'It's the fool who allows himself to be caught.' I didn't get caught—it was afterwards that Yaw Mensah went and made 'konkonsa' about me and my master came to the police who put handcuffs to my hands and said I should find somebody to bail me and the Ewe chief-man—there he sits, my Lords—he bailed me . . ."

"COUR-R-R-T RA-A-A-A-I-I-S!" the burly Constable shouted as the chairman got up, followed by the two panel members. They were going to "agyina" to ask the "Old Woman" what she thought of the case. (Who she was nobody knew but whenever the court rose to hold consultation, it was said to be going to ask the "Old Woman" for an opinion. I wondered how much tobacco they bought for her from the fines they got in court). Well, they came back, there was another order for "COUR-R-RT RA-A-A-I-I-S!" and Yaovi got his three months imprisonment and we all went home to see whether our mothers had finished pounding the fruits and vegetables into *fufu* balls.

Yes, I remembered all this as I stood there in the dock and it was quite like a dream—as if I was outside myself and only looking at something that was being acted with me in it.

Even my arrest appeared like a joke—I was going to Kwaa Maanu's store where we boys always gathered, when the OBK (the office bookkeeper in charge of the local authority police station) called me. I was wearing my coffee gabardine trousers which I had sewn in Kumasi some time ago when my grandfather sent me to Ahafo to see about some little cocoa farms he'd got there. I was also wearing brown "talking mokes" to match, a pair of

moccasin shoes with a lot of iron protectors at the bottom which were put there not only because I feared the shoes would wear out early but because they made quite a good noise on the hard pavement and that compelled the people to turn round to see who was coming. Yes, I was quite boogied up and when that OBK guy called me, I thought he was going to ask me where I sewed my trousers and where I bought my "mokes" and how much they cost. I had consequently thought up some big figures which would let him know that a guy like me, although "unbeez," that is unemployed, could yet challenge those mouthy working fellows when it came to real good buying. And, of course, I had a lot of big names at the tip of my tongue regarding where I got the trousers made—names that would stagger that bush son-of-a-gun who called himself OBK—"Tiger Bay" for instance—I was sure he'd never heard the name of that famous Kumasi tailoring shop.

You can see my great surprise therefore when he asked me quite bluntly as soon as I got where he was standing: "Have you paid your Land Poll?"

"Land Poll?" I asked in complete bewilderment. I knew it was the basic rate that was levied in most towns and villages but I'd never thought of it in connection with me. Why, Land Poll was paid by grown-ups. I left Middle School only two years ago and although I had a small goatee which gave me quite a dignified look, I never ever thought of myself as a person liable to pay levy.

"Land Poll?" I asked the OBK again, hoping I had not heard him right. He nodded his head and I became convinced that the guy had gone crackers.

"Ho!" I said, "but I'm only a kid you know—I've never paid Land Poll before—I left school only two years ago—I'm unemployed and just about being apprenticed to Tailor Asiedu! Ho! I think you're mistaken—I don't think I'm liable to pay Land Poll. After all, I'm only a kid, you know—just a kid—"

As I said this, I involuntarily ran my hand over the flat top of my "Abidjan" haircut and stroked the thousand and one clusters of hair that passed for my goatee. Perhaps that was against me for the OBK's next statement wasn't reassuring at all.

"You're a kid, are you?" he said. "I bet if you talk to the chief's wife three times, she will have a baby with a monkey face like yours, eh, kid boy? Ho! Ho! You sure aren't gonna get away with any of that crybaby talk. You're gonna pay this levy, man, and I'm gonna see that you do so rightaway!"

He blew his whistle and two stalwarts quickly came out of the chief's place (which served as the courthouse and police station). I recognized one of the stalwarts as the chap who said "WORLER! WORLER!" in court all the time and into whose hands I had always thought it wouldn't be a nice thing at all for anybody to fall. There they came running—two stalwart Northern Ghana Police Constables, ready to do anything their OBK master said.

Guys like me knew those illiterate policemen too well. When they come to you, they don't fool around; they just say: "Massa say, me plus you, come. You go-go or you no go-go?" And with that, they brandish their truncheons and if you are silly enough to argue with them, then God have mercy on you. Their language only extends to as far as "Massa say . . ." Whatever else anybody says is immaterial.

"Issa! Braimah!" the OBK called to them. "Dis boy here, ino pay Lampoll; make you bring am for office!" He walked off and the two stalwarts held me, one by each arm, and marched me to the OBK's office. Within the twinkling of an eye, he had written out a summons against me, asking me to come to court that very day to show cause why I hadn't paid my basic rate. Fortunately, he didn't ask me to find somebody to offer me bail and I strode out of the office, with only the piece of paper he'd

given me to remind me of the morning's unpleasant experience.

It was eight-thirty when the OBK caught me—the time we boys usually boogied up to come to town. I was due in court at two o'clock. Well, I got to Kwaa Maanu's store and, as usual, the whole pack of lads was there. There they all sat in the bar adjoining the store, each with an empty bottle and glass beside him. You see, Maanu's store-owner was an avaricious old bird who objected to our collecting up there like that and taking things easy without buying anything, and in the past, whenever he came to find us there, he'd drive us out. But Kwaa Maanu was a good pal—the long hours he sat alone at the store had made him appreciative of good company and he bought the idea that we should have empty bottles by our sides whilst sitting there. When the store-owner came, he would be floored for he would have no way of proving that it was not we who actually bought the beer from the empty bottles that stood in front of us. Kwaa Maanu would swear by us at all costs, damn his master. So there we always sat, carefree and absolutely uninhibited—talking about anything from the latest attempts on the moon to the latest pranks on Oto, the *dekyee* (meat seller) who had gone haywire.

As soon as I took my seat at the table in the centre of the bar, I put my hand in my hip-pocket and took out the summons the OBK had given me, thinking I'd rock the place with this bit of hot news. As soon as they saw it, however, they all chanted in unison: "Yieeeeeeee! Pall Mall! Pall Mall!"

I knew too well what "Pall Mall" meant in our parlance. We discovered the name from the game of "Monopoly" and liked the sound of it and since "Pall" sounded like "Pour" (to us at any rate) and "Mall" like "More," we applied it whenever we wanted to say that more had been added or "poured in." For instance, if we were playing cards and somebody brought forward a

spade, he'd say "Pall Mall! Pall Mall." Words like this made us quite unintelligible to the elder folks of the village but it was those which made us clique together as a bunch.

Well, the boys greeted my summons sheet with "Pall Mall! Pall Mall" and very soon each of them was bringing a similar thing out of his pocket. They were all assembled on top of the table—a good pack of pink paper they were, I assure you, and we all burst out laughing and kicked chairs and tossed the papers about. Then, the boys gave me the lowdown. They had all been dealt with in exactly the same manner as myself. First, the friendly call from the OBK, the moment of suspense and then there was the Land Poll thrust at them followed by the two stalwart constables.

We all agreed it had been a deft move on the part of the OBK but wondered how it all got into his damned thick socket of a head in the first place. Many suggestions were put forward—and one was that he had "chopped" some of the Local Council's money and wanted to save himself from exposure and a possible prison sentence by arresting people for not paying Land Poll and getting the court to fine them. There were many suggestions like that but it was what Yaw Kyere said which went properly into everybody's ears.

"Friends, Ghanaians, Countrymen!" he said, in his usual imitation of Mark Anthony. We all knew that was the only bit of Anthony's speech he remembered from his Oxford English Reader Book Six but we let it pass and never molested him for assuming literary airs.

"Friends, Ghanaians, Countrymen," he said. "The plain fact is we Gab Boys are out of favour in town. Last time when I was passing one of the palm-wine bars, I heard some of the grown-ups discussing us. They said: 'These boys are getting too many on our streets—they're finished school and yet won't go out of town to look for work and are staying here, not caring to go to farm with

their parents to help produce more food. They're just a hell of a nuisance, they are; and if nothing is done about them, they're going to become a breed of lawless wild ones who will just terrorize this peaceful village of ours.' "

There were angry cries of protest at this from all the boys; for although we liked dressing like cowboys and occasionally yelled across the streets in Injun style, halting oncoming traffic, that was only to attract attention from the dames and was nothing more than a superficial display of tough guy prowess.

"I challenged them on this," Yaw Kyere hastily assured us, "and pointed out that although it was true we all dressed in *tunaabo* (gun-mouth) or drain-pipe trousers and occasionally put on jeans and broad-brim hats, that was only an outward show. Inside, deep down, I added, we were sweeter than angels, true, true! Well, those grown-up fellows, they looked at me and laughed. 'Sweeter than angels, eh?' Agya Toroh said." (Agya Toroh's real name was Kwame Kaakyire but because he was fond of saying things which people didn't want said about them, we all called him "Agya Toroh," meaning something like "Father of Lies.")

"Yes, Agya Toroh challenged my statement that we were sweeter than angels and cited the 'Brokages Case' to prove that we weren't anything of the sort."

"Yie-e-e-e-e! B-r-o-o-o-o-k-a-g-e-s! B-r-o-o-o-k-e!" . . . all the boys shouted when Yaw Kyere mentioned this case. It happened only last Christmas. An Akuapem man called Yaw Boafo had a beer store just a few yards from where our "bench" Kwaa Maanu had his, and was fond of attracting customers who would otherwise have bought from our pal, thus depriving him of quite a lot of commission. We all resented this for we didn't like strangers to make money in our town though we all wanted to travel somewhere to make money. Anyway this Yaw Boafo was a fool for he kept his empty bottles uncovered at the back of his store where we usually sat with our

dames on a *bonhon* (iron pipe) which I think was once meant to serve as a drain for one of the bridges in our village but was thought better of and so left there for us. There were quite a number of stones near this *bonhon* and occasionally a lad would pick one and hurl it into the heap of bottles: "T-o-o-o-o-o-oh-h." We loved that "t-o-o-o-h-h" sound, man, and we would do it for no reason than just to hear it sound.

Yaw Boafo would come out of his shop and rain abuses on us whenever "T-o-o-o-o-h-h!" sounded. But we would hurl his insults back at him and since he was only one and we were many, he got the worse part of it and we weren't bothered and went on making "T-o-o-o-o-h-h! . . . T-o-o-o-o-o-h-h" occasionally, as our mood dictated. However, since this was spasmodic, quite a lot of bottles remained for Yaw Boafo. But on Twenty-fourth Night, we thought better of our occasional job and decided we'd bombard the whole lot of bottles and peradventure, force Yaw Boafo out of competition with our pal, Kwaa Maanu. So after going round the town firing toy guns and shouting and burning the sheds of the market women (all these were accepted practice in our village, you know; the market woman whose table or shed was burnt would be blamed by the others for not having enough foresight to hide her things in a safe place on Twenty-fourth Night. No blame was attached to us at all. You see, the people in our village were very liberal and they knew without being told that boys will be boys and must needs have their fun, damn whoever suffered as a result)—yeah, after we'd fired guns and made bonfires and whooped across the streets and fought with one another and drunk a hell lot of *akpeteshie* (local gin), we all came back to the *bonhon*. One of our most "tired" boys, that is, one of those who knew the world most, "Mark Brown"—the "African Cowboy"—took a chalk and wrote in big block letters on top of the heap of bottles: "EASY BOTTLES, EASY BROKE!"

Well, Mark wrote that in white block letters on the black wall against which the bottles were heaped and as the last of the gang converged on the *bonhon*, they all filled their pockets with stones, ready to go into action the moment word was given. We sat on the *bonhon* for a while harassing the few girls who were about and then when Mark thought he had had enough black looks from the girls, he went and stood a little way up front and putting his hands to his lips in true Tarzan style, yelled: "CHA-A-A-R-R-GE!"

Before his words had died down his throat, hundreds of stones were hurtling into the heap of bottles "T-o-o-o-o-o-h-h! To-o-o-o-o-h! To-o-o-o-h-h!"

Just as the last stone was hitting the last of the thousand or so bottles, up showed Yaw Boafo, wearing only a pair of shorts and his eyes flashing wild with anger. He came with one of his best friends in town, a chap called Yaw Ampoma—also dressed in shorts which was strange for he was one of the holders of traditional office in the town. But it wasn't too surprising because we believed he was a fool and he was always broke, though he was called with the prefix, Opanin (elder), in respect for his office. He liked to befriend strangers for he managed to get loans from them, ignorant as they were of his always-broke condition and his record of unpaid loans. Maybe they were deceived by his title—they were flattered to have an "elder" of the town as a friend. He, for his part, always took care to get people to address him with the title Opanin whenever he was walking with strangers.

Well, this man and Yaw Boafo were close friends because Yaw Boafo gave him both loans and free palm wine and even an occasional beer. As soon as they got to us, the "elder" shouted out: "Remain where you are, all of you. I have seen you all." And he began to call out our names while Yaw Boafo wrote them down or pretended to do so—we had heard he was illiterate but he had pencil and paper all the same. The while, we stood silent

like some dangerous beasts who were being harried but who had not yet made up their minds how to strike back.

Circumstances decided our course of action for us. One of our toughest guys, Kwasi Fori, was standing a little away from us, passing water against a wall. Opanin Yaw Ampoma could not see him properly from where he stood and went towards him saying: "You big coward! You think you can fool us by that eh?—pissing unconcernedly as if you were not one of the criminals! Turn round and let me see your wicked face!" With that, he wheeled Kwasi Fori round, causing urine to spill all over his brand new gabardine trousers.

Kwasi Fori eyed him coolly from the corners of his eyes, just as Roy Rogers does when somebody handles Trigger roughly. Opanin Ampoma wasn't perturbed at all for he was a tall and burly fellow with strong arms and a big chest while Kwasi Fori was small and only measured up to the nape of Opanin Ampoma's neck. "He is called Kwasi Fori; his father is Kwaku Antwi, the chief's linguist's brother!" Opanin Ampoma shouted out to his friend Yaw Boafo.

In the meantime, Kwasi had buttoned up his trousers again coolly, and just as Opanin Ampoma's words died down and he was retracing his steps back to where Yaw Boafo stood, Kwasi let him have it—just where we knew he'd do it—right up in the middle of his protruding palm wine fattened belly. Opanin Ampoma bent forward, screaming: "Agye-e-e-e-eh! Waku me!" (My father! He's killed me!) As he bent his huge frame forward, clutching his stomach with both hands, Kwasi went into action again and gave him two terrific socks on the jaw—wham! wham! while we yelled in unison that Ga cry of applause at blows which we had learnt from the cinema halls of Accra and which is unprintable.

The three blows following quickly upon each other were all that was needed to transform Opanin Ampoma into a huge piece of beef ready to be pounded into pulp

by the obliging fists of Kwasi Fori. "Wham! Wham! Wham! puh! wham! puh! wham!" it went. And we yelled that Ga cry each time a blow sounded so that it looked exactly as if we were actually at a cowboy film and were watching the screen hero giving the villain the works. At one stage, Opanin Ampoma's "Agyeeeeee-h Agyeeeeeeee-h" could have been heard for a mile afield. Finally, he hit upon a strategy—he thought if he fell, and pretended to be unconscious, Kwasi Fori's deluge of blows would cease. So as Kwasi caught him one more in the jaw, he fell forward, limp. He did not of course know that Kwasi didn't spend his time at the cinemas dozing. Kwasi let him fall halfway and then caught him back by his belt and wheeled him round suddenly, his left hand ready to smack home one more time. It never did. Yaw Boafo had seen too much and had at last forgotten his own fear and ran up to hold Kwasi's drawn left hand to prevent him from giving any further punishment to his "elder" friend. We closed in as soon as Yaw Boafo held Kwasi's hand. But he spoke quickly before we could do him anything.

"My friends, I beg your pardon—I won't take any notice of the broken bottles—please let my friend and me go free!"

"WHAT ABOUT MY GAB TROUSERS?" Kwasi Fori asked, a dangerous glint in his eyes. He added force to his words by rounding his fists as if ready to hit again that moment.

"Oh—I'll p-pay back its p-price for you! How much is it?"

"The material cost four guineas and the tailor charged one quid—five pounds four in all! Let it make me wa-a-a-a-h! right now!"

Yaw Boafo put his hand to his pocket. He pulled out five pounds. "Please take this—that's all I have at the moment," he said.

Kwasi took the money and then began to walk away towards his house. We all followed him. But Opanin

Ampoma had now found better use of his tongue than merely saying "AGYEEEEEEEEI!" with it and shouted back at us "What about the trousers? If you h-h-have t-t-taken the money, then b-b-bring the trousers to him?"

One of Kwasi Fori's qualities we liked best was his never failing sense of humor. He always had the right word to say at the right time to make everybody laugh. He said to Opanin Ampoma: "If you are a man, come here and pull the trousers off me!" And he said it without the slightest trace of a laugh in his voice which made it all the more funny for us and we all burst out laughing. Yaw Boafo consoled his friend and said: "Let him take it —what do you want with a pair of ruined trousers?"

We followed Kwasi to his house where he took one of the pound notes Yaw Boafo had given him and sent three of the smaller boys to go with it to buy eight tins of corned beef. While we waited, we discussed the fight and praised Kwasi, saying that not even Burt Lancaster of "Ten Tall Men" fame could have done it better. We all laughed again when somebody said he wondered whether Opanin Ampoma would dare take the case to the Police Station. We knew he could do no such thing for if the other "elders" of the chief heard he had been beaten up by a "commoner," they would ask him to slaughter a sheep to pacify his ancestors who had thus been vilified and we knew his pocket and the price of a sheep did not meet by a long mile. He would keep mum—the worst he could say when inquisitive people asked about his swollen lips and face would be that he had been stung by *mpenoa* (wasps) which he encountered when he went to see whether his cola nuts had begun to ripen. He wasn't above that kind of lie.

The corned beef did not take long to come and we ate up all the eight tins raw, that is without adding any food. By the time we finished, a few of us had cuts where the tins had bruised the backs of our hands—nobody had enough patience to wait until the contents were emptied

into a pan or plate. We struggled over it and when we'd eaten it all up, we drank some water from a barrel that was nearby. Then we each went to his home to sleep peacefully. We were happy to be alive—such adventure as the one we had been through made life worth living.

You see, to be quite frank, we had nothing to live for. We respected nothing and nobody and no one respected us, no one cared two hooks about us. There we were, none older than twenty, a whole pack of us, our imagination fuelled to combustion point by the many action-packed American films we saw each time we took a trip to a big town. And yet we had no creative occupation to keep us busy and away from mischief. We had all finished school, and yet we had no work. With us, you finished school when you reached Middle Form Four—Standard Seven. Those who were clever would go on to secondary schools after successfully taking the Common Entrance Examination. None of us had even bothered to take that exam when it came to our turn—two turns each of us had—one in standard five and one in standard six. And each time, those of us who could get their parents to give them money took it and travelled outside the town to some place and chopped it. For we knew we didn't stand a dog's chance. Imagine all the Standard Five and Standard Six children in the whole country fighting for the few places in the extremely few Government assisted secondary schools and technical schools. Soaaaaaaaaaaa! We wouldn't even try. As for the encouraged secondary schools that held their own entrance examinations, you didn't need to worry about them. If you had the money, somehow you would find admission into one, damn entrance exams. It was the dough that counted. You could depend on their headmasters to take in as many students as possible and give them as few qualified teachers as possible. It was a business and we knew it. Our parents had no money anyway. And even if they had, we knew of many young chaps who had gone to such secondary schools and failed even

to get grade five at the school certificate examination. They came home and tried to sit for the exam as private candidates. But they failed again and again and became a liability to their parents. Even if they succeeded in getting work, because they did not have their school certificate they got very poor pay, just slightly better than what we Standard Seven lads would get if we found jobs.

We knew all about these things and so we were not too bothered about our lack of education. If we had no work, it was not because we were bad but because there were no jobs. Tell us to go to farm—to "go back to the land" —and we would say: "Look here, sir! If we wanted to be farmers we would not have wasted a full ten years learning to read and write. If we wanted to be farmers like our fathers, we would not have gone to school to get whipped and driven about and bullied and taught simple interest and other sums which made our heads reel. No, sir. If we are to be farmers at all, we don't want to just weed a piece of land and plant yam or plantain or cocoyam or just cassavas or vegetables on it, the topsy-turvy way we've seen our fathers do for years and years. The subsistence farming which barely gives them enough food to live on and keeps them for ever at the mercy of moneylenders. No, sir. If we wanted that kind of thing, we wouldn't have got our fathers to scrape their last pennies to pay our school fees and buy our fantastically expensive text-books."

In fact, our fathers would be annoyed if we suggested that we should follow their footsteps and become farmers. A farmer who was illiterate sent his son to school not only to get him to write the occasional letter he might wish to send or to read the one which he received. After all, there were letter writers, professional ones, who would be glad to oblige in the unlikely event of the farmer wishing to communicate with anyone outside his small world.

No, your father sent you to school to become a clerk who wore a white shirt whom he could show off as *me ba krakyenii no* (my educated son). If he wanted you to become a farmer like himself, he would not have paid your fees for a good ten years and bought you a school uniform every year in the bargain. He would just have started you off when you were a kid and gone to his farm with you every day of the week except Sunday. By that, he would not have got you to become a farmer but to help produce food instead of just eating it and whittling away the little money that cocoa brought. No, sir. His son was educated so that he could come home from a big town occasionally overburdened with cakes and Nsawam bread and a good swell city hat or pipe for grand old pap. Or that he should send an occasional money order home and get his illiterate father to go round all the educated people in the village to have them read the correct sum on it for him and show him how he could let the piece of paper become money which could buy real tobacco. Yes, sir. Such was the purpose of educating his son. He should wear a white shirt and gabardine trousers and "talking" shoes and a nice wristwatch and get people to look at him whenever he walked in the streets. He wanted people to say: "That is the son of Agya (a prefix used for all elderly males) so-and-so!"

Well, we had no jobs and were highly imaginative. Thank God, food was no problem once we stayed in our town. Ever since creation, no Akyem-born lad living in his own village had ever starved, no matter what kind of guy he was. Let him drink *akpeteshie* every day and come home to rain abuses on his mother; he would still get his round ball of *fufu* in the evening. Let him roam the streets breaking people's bottles and filling up the space in people's bars. When he got home, his old mother would have come back from her farm and would have somehow managed to pound her *fufu* single-handed and his sizeable ball would be there waiting. If the meat in the soup was small, who cared? As Mark Brown would say, "A BEGGAR HAS NO CHOOSE." The proverb in

Twi was *Su kon no nnsu nam* (Cry for food and not for meat).

"So, what do you think we should do?" Yaw Kyere asked the palm-wine drinkers when he found their arguments too strong. (He wasn't a Mark Anthony for nothing. He always knew that people could criticize hell out of you but when you passed the buck on to them and asked them to suggest concrete ways by which you could improve the matters they so well disliked, they always fell flat on their backs.) "What do you think we should do?" Yaw Kyere asked them.

One said: "Of course you should all be rounded up and sent to the Borstal Institutes. When you eat kenkey and dried fish for three years, you will have some sense knocked into your empty skulls."

"But would there be enough Borstal Institutes to accommodate all of us?" Yaw Kyere asked. "Don't forget," he pointed out, "that we are not the only boys of our type in this country. We are Esiaho boys. Okay. There are Kibi boys; Apedwa boys; Accra boys; Kumasi boys; Sakasaka boys . . . And also girls!"

The fellows up there were staggered. They had always thought of us in a vacuum; they didn't realize that we were only a branch of a whole lot of unproductive young worth-nothings who were plaguing themselves and the country.

So Yaw Kyere kicked some of the wind out of those palm-wine drinkers but he didn't stop them feeling resentful about us. He said as he left the place, he heard them talking hu-hu-hu-hu about us. And not very long afterwards he saw the OBK go in there for his afternoon calabash of palm wine. So it was quite possible that the Land Poll business came into his head after he had heard all the things those palm-wine people said about us. In fact, it could have been suggested to him by them for they themselves were unproductive; most of them thrived on little cocoa farms left to them by their dead uncles

and since the cocoa season comes only twice a year, they loafed about like us most of the time, taking odd farming jobs that came to them, *dakoro-adwuma* (one-day jobs). We were becoming a threat to them, so they figured; though in what respect I don't understand. They therefore boozed up the OBK and got him to start the Land Poll campaign against us. They were talking like that when Opanin Yaw Ampoma, the principal victim of the "Brokages Incident," entered. As soon as he heard what they were talking about, he supported the idea that if the OBK got us all rounded up and brought us to court for not paying our Land Poll, some of our arrogance would vanish. Of course, he would see that we got the kind of justice we deserved—even if he himself, as an elder, wasn't on the local court panel the day we went to court, he would see the fellows who would be on it and get to them the threat we were to the whole village, and so understand and give us something hot to take the wind out of us. All this, of course, was Yaw Kyere's theory. And like the good Anthony that he was, he warned us that it would be dangerous, in spite of what we had been told, to ignore the summons on the ground that it was corrupt. If we refused to go to court, he warned, that would bring warrants against us and, as everybody knew, a warrant was a much stronger thing than a summons. And infinitely more trouble-causing. They were always accompanied by handcuffs.

But talk of warrants had just the opposite effect on us boys. "Let them bring the darn things," we said. "We won't go to court, let them bring the warrants."

I regret to say I was the only one who came out against the idea of not going to court. It wasn't that I was afraid of the warrant (though it was quite frightening to think of it—a warrant!) but I thought we had a good case. Every court in the world would acquit us, I argued. For where on earth were people arrested for not paying taxes when they were known to be unemployed? More-

over, we were minors; all of us were still in our teens, even if we were late there; and we left school only two years ago and although we had some hairs on our chins, that didn't mean we were grown-up. In our society, being grown-up was a status which came to you. When you left school and got work to do and earned some money you became grown-up. But not before. We could get the court to understand that, I was sure.

"And also, we do not vote!" said Mark Anthony.

"YE-E-E-E-E-S-S-S!!! EXA-A-A-C-T-LY!! W-E D-O-N-'T V-O-O-OTE," we all said in our usual unison.

"Now you see we have an even better argument," I said. "People who pay taxes are those who vote. We don't yet have the vote so we can't be expected to pay taxes. Remember what we learnt during history lessons?" I asked with a sudden touch of genius. "The American revolution was partly caused by taxation without representation."

In spite of this sound defence I thought we'd got, however, the other lads still maintained that they would not go to court and present it. They said the only thing that could make a local authority court see sense was a showdown. When you challenged its authority, then it would begin to see the arguments in your favor. But if you succumbed to its call and put yourself in its hands, then woe unto you.

I was still not convinced and they rained abuses on me, calling me "a girl in boy's clothing" and many other such unsavory names. As for my reference to the American Revolution, it was brushed aside, one clever lad pointing out that that happened in 1666(!)—long ago—and anyway it was against a British Queen! Whereas we no more had a British Queen but our own Osagyefo. I was beaten flat for I never remember the dates of historical facts and as soon as somebody argues against me and quotes a date, I just keep quiet. All the same, I said

I would go to court and argue my case properly and show the court that we young boys, too, knew the law. What could they say to the argument that we didn't vote? Or that we didn't work?

Hence it was that I stood in the dock that two o'clock. My mother had just returned from her farm and was sitting with the crowd, still in her farm clothes. I wondered what went on inside her mind! Did she think I was an ass? I had heard the other women there whispering that I was too *mfenim*, that is I was "too known." I thought I knew better than anybody else. Where were the other boys who had got summonses like myself? They were on the streets playing and here was I, showing all the world that I was a brave and wise lad who was not afraid to go to court. Well, let me wait and see.