Building the Nation
Henry Barlow (Uganda)

Today I did my share
In building the nation.
I drove a Permanent Secretary
To an important, urgent function
In fact, to a luncheon at the Vic.

The menu reflected its importance
Cold bell beer with small talk,
Then fried chicken with niceties
Wine to fill the hollowness of the laughs
Ice-cream to cover the stereotype jokes
Coffee to keep the PS awake on the return journey.

I drove the Permanent Secretary back.
He yawned many times in back of the car
Then to keep awake, he suddenly asked,
Did you have any lunch friend?
I replied looking straight ahead
And secretly smiling at his belated concern
That I had not, but was slimming!
Upon which he said with a seriousness
That amused more than annoyed me,
Mwananchi, I too had none!
I attended to matters of state.
Highly delicate diplomatic duties you know,
And friend, it goes against my grain,
Causes me stomach ulcers and wind.
Ah, he continued, yawning again,
The pains we suffer in building the nation!
So the PS had ulcers too!
My ulcers I think are equally painful
Only they are caused by hunger,
Not sumptuous lunches!

So two nation builders
Arrived home this evening
With terrible stomach pains
The result of building the nation -
- Different ways.

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