The Primary School at Pietersburg
(By Gerard Moerdlyk)

"School days are the happiest days of one's life," says the proverb; and the most impressionable adds the psychologist. We should therefore see to it that our schools, where children spend so great a part of the day, bring happiness and make a lasting impression for good.

Our typical Transvaal school, that square uncomfortable looking brick building, with its rows of uninteresting windows, looks more like a penal institution than like a place where happiness lives and high ideals are born. The influence of surroundings upon placed as well as sensitive children has been entirely neglected.

Our education system tends of necessity to uniformity—to mass production—every child goes through the same syllabus, in the same way, at the same pace and according to the same rules. Our schools have been built all according to stereotype plans, one as alike to the other as peas in a pod, each as poverty-stricken as its neighbour, as regards originality of construction and beauty of design.

These buildings have not been put up at poverty prices either. Each one of them has been built for a fair and often for more than a fair price, but bricks and mortar alone cannot produce a building capable of inspiring children with the traditional love for their school or ambitions for their future.

All children instinctively like beautiful things. Many live in drab homes, amid drab surroundings. That is unavoidable, but it is possible to give them beautiful schools, without spending any more money than in the past. Why then condemn them to those dismal, colourless white classrooms, all alike and arranged in stiff rows like so many telegraph poles. The child's nature must react unfavourably to this uninspired monotony.

Our system in the past has been all wrong. One cannot turn out art by machinery; just as impossible is it for a government department where everything is done by rule and line instead of by interest and inspiration, to build schools which do not bear the brand of duplication. It is only by individual application that, in individual work can be achieved.

In the design for the Pietersburg Primary School an attempt has been made to combine the useful, the hygienic and the beautiful. The design comprises four wings, radiating from an octagonal open-air amphitheatre. This space was originally intended for a central hall, but as no primary school is allowed a hall, this open-air meeting place was evolved.

Maybe the parents of the little Pietersburg scholars will be glad later on that that central hall did not go through, for this open-air...