

## ***Epiphany Under the Sun by Paul Theroux***

Paved roads ran where there had once been only rutted tracks; the train line to Balaka that I had taken in 1964 to a Mua leprosarium by the lake was defunct - and so was the leper colony.

The ferry at Liwonde across the Shire River had been replaced by a bridge. All this was progress, but still on these new thoroughfares the Africans, buttocks showing in their tattered clothes, walked barefoot.

I did not arrive in the hill-town of Zomba until after dark. The main street was unlit, people flitting and stumbling in the dark. Zomba had been the capital of Malawi's British incarnation, the little tea-growing protectorate of Nyasaland.

The still small town was a collection of tin-roofed, red-brick buildings clustered together at the edge of Zomba plateau. The Zomba Gymkhana Club had been the settlers' meeting place and social centre in British times but, absurdly, membership was restricted according to pigmentation, whites predominating, a few Indians, some golden-skinned mixed-raced people known then as "coloureds". Even in the years just after Malawi's independence in 1964 the club was nearly all white - horsey men and women, cricketers and rugger hearties.

Back then, I was not a member of any club, but was sometimes an unwilling party to rants by beer-swilling Brits, wearing club blazers and cardigans, and saying, "Let Africans in here and they'll be tearing up the billiard table and getting drunk and bringing their snotty little piccanins in the bar. There'll be some African woman nursing her baby in the games room."

This was considered rude and racist, yet in its offensive way it was fairly prescient, for the rowdy teenagers now at the billiard table were stabbing their cues at the torn felt, the bar was full of drunks, and a woman was breast-feeding her baby under the dart board. But if the fabric of the place had deteriorated, the atmosphere was about the same as before. Some relics remained - the sets of kudu and springbok horns mounted high on the wall, the glass cases of dusty fishing flies. The calendar was months out of date, the portraits were gone, the floor was unswept.

Soon my friend arrived and greeted me warmly. He was David Rubadiri, whom I had first met in 1963, when he had been headmaster of my school, Soche Hill - Sochay, was the correct way of saying it. The shortage of college graduates at independence meant that Rubadiri was plucked from the school and put into the diplomatic service.

The prime minister, Hastings Banda, appointed him Malawi's ambassador to Washington. There, Rubadiri prospered until three or four months after independence,

when there was a sudden power struggle. The cabinet ministers denounced Hastings Banda as a despot and held a vote of no confidence in parliament.

From a distance, Rubadiri joined in, but Banda survived what became an attempted coup d'etat, and he turned on his accusers. Those who had opposed him either left the country or fought in the guerrilla underground. Banda remained in power for the next 30 years.

Rubadiri was disgraced for taking sides, and lost his job. He went to Uganda to teach at Makerere University. After it became known that I had assisted him - I delivered him his car, driving it 2,000 miles through the bush to Uganda - I was accused of aiding the rebels and branded a revolutionary. I was deported from Malawi late in 1965, ejected from the Peace Corps ("You have jeopardised the whole programme!"), and with Rubadiri's help, was hired at Makerere.

One week I was a schoolteacher, the following week a university professor. The combination of physical risk, social activism, revolutionary fervour, Third World politics and naiveté characterised this drama of the 60s.

So our careers, Rubadiri's and mine, had become intertwined. We had been friends for 38 years. His fortunes had risen again with the change of government in Malawi. In the mid-90s he was appointed Malawi's ambassador to the UN, and after four or five years, was made vice-chancellor of the University of Malawi.

He had two wives and nine children, and was now almost 70, grizzled and venerable. It was wonderful to see him again. We went down the hill to the University Club, another glorified bar from the 20s. One man I recognised almost immediately as an old student of mine - the same chubby face and big head on narrow shoulders, the same heavy-lidded eyes that made him look ironic. His hair was grey but otherwise he was Sam Mpechetula, now wearing shoes. I had last seen him when he was a barefoot 15-year-old, in grey shorts.

He was now 52, in a jacket and necktie. He was married, a father of four, and a teacher at Bunda College, outside Lilongwe. So at least I could say that one of my students had taken my place as an English teacher in a Malawi classroom. That had been one of my more modest goals.

"Do you remember much about our school?" I asked. "It was a good school - the best. They were the best days of my life," he said. "The Peace Corps guys were wonderful. They brought blue jeans and long hair to Malawi."

"What a legacy," I said. "They talked to Africans. Do you know, before they came, white people didn't talk to us."

## ***Dracula by Bram Stoker***

*3 May. Bistritz.*—Left Munich at 8:35 P. M., on 1st May, arriving at Vienna early next morning; should have arrived at 6:46, but train was an hour late. Buda-Pesth seems a wonderful place, from the glimpse which I got of it from the train and the little I could walk through the streets. I feared to go very far from the station, as we had arrived late and would start as near the correct time as possible. The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East; the most western of splendid bridges over the Danube, which is here of noble width and depth, took us among the traditions of Turkish rule.

We left in pretty good time, and came after nightfall to Klausenburgh. Here I stopped for the night at the Hotel Royale. I had for dinner, or rather supper, a chicken done up some way with red pepper, which was very good but thirsty. (*Mem.*, get recipe for Mina.) I asked the waiter, and he said it was called “paprika hendl,” and that, as it was a national dish, I should be able to get it anywhere along the Carpathians. I found my smattering of German very useful here; indeed, I don’t know how I should be able to get on without it.

Having had some time at my disposal when in London, I had visited the British Museum, and made search among the books and maps in the library regarding Transylvania; it had struck me that some foreknowledge of the country could hardly fail to have some importance in dealing with a nobleman of that country. I find that the district he named is in the extreme east of the country, just on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia and Bukovina, in the midst of the Carpathian mountains; one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe. I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula, as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey maps; but I found that Bistritz, the post town named by Count Dracula, is a fairly well-known place. I shall enter here some of my notes, as they may refresh my memory when I talk over my travels with Mina.

In the population of Transylvania there are four distinct nationalities: Saxons in the South, and mixed with them the Wallachs, who are the descendants of the Dacians; Magyars in the West, and Szekelys in the East and North. I am going among the latter, who claim to be descended from Attila and the Huns. This may be so, for when the Magyars conquered the country in the eleventh century they found the Huns settled in it. I read that every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool; if so my stay may be very interesting. (*Mem.*, I must ask the Count all about them.)

I did not sleep well, though my bed was comfortable enough, for I had all sorts of queer dreams. There was a dog howling all night under my window, which may have had something to do with it; or it may have been the paprika, for I had to drink up all the water in my carafe, and was still thirsty. Towards morning I slept and was wakened by the continuous knocking at my door, so I guess I must have been sleeping soundly then. I had for breakfast more paprika, and a sort of porridge of maize flour which they said was “mamaliga,” and egg-plant stuffed with forcemeat, a very excellent dish, which they call “impletata.” (*Mem.*, get recipe for this also.) I had to hurry breakfast, for the train started a little before eight, or rather it ought to have done so, for

after rushing to the station at 7:30 I had to sit in the carriage for more than an hour before we began to move. It seems to me that the further east you go the more unpunctual are the trains. What ought they to be in China?

All day long we seemed to dawdle through a country which was full of beauty of every kind. Sometimes we saw little towns or castles on the top of steep hills such as we see in old missals; sometimes we ran by rivers and streams which seemed from the wide stony margin on each side of them to be subject to great floods. It takes a lot of water, and running strong, to sweep the outside edge of a river clear. At every station there were groups of people, sometimes crowds, and in all sorts of attire. Some of them were just like the peasants at home or those I saw coming through France and Germany, with short jackets and round hats and home-made trousers; but others were very picturesque. The women looked pretty, except when you got near them, but they were very clumsy about the waist. They had all full white sleeves of some kind or other, and most of them had big belts with a lot of strips of something fluttering from them like the dresses in a ballet, but of course there were petticoats under them. The strangest figures we saw were the Slovaks, who were more barbarian than the rest, with their big cow-boy hats, great baggy dirty-white trousers, white linen shirts, and enormous heavy leather belts, nearly a foot wide, all studded over with brass nails. They wore high boots, with their trousers tucked into them, and had long black hair and heavy black moustaches. They are very picturesque, but do not look prepossessing. On the stage they would be set down at once as some old Oriental band of brigands. They are, however, I am told, very harmless and rather wanting in natural self-assertion.

It was on the dark side of twilight when we got to Bistritz, which is a very interesting old place. Being practically on the frontier—for the Borgo Pass leads from it into Bukovina—it has had a very stormy existence, and it certainly shows marks of it. Fifty years ago a series of great fires took place, which made terrible havoc on five separate occasions. At the very beginning of the seventeenth century it underwent a siege of three weeks and lost 13,000 people, the casualties of war proper being assisted by famine and disease.