



Br Stephen Rodenbücher, S.J.
(1872-1948. In Zambia Oct 1910-Sept 1913)

29 October 1948

Stephen Rodenbücher was born in Nemetker, Tolna in the south of Hungary on 25 September 1872. He entered the Austrian-Hungarian Province in 1898. Shortly afterwards he was sent to the Lower Zambesi Mission in Mozambique. The mission originally was international but in 1893 it was confided to the Portuguese Province.

Within a few years, mission stations were set up along the Zambezi Valley all the way to the boundaries of Northern Rhodesia. It was a time of great expansion with a key role being played by a team of dedicated brothers who, not only put up the magnificent mission stations of Boroma and Miruru, but also taught in the well-equipped trade schools, that had such an impact on the whole region.

Br Rodenbücher as a Hungarian would have been quite at ease with several other members of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire like Br Longa (Slovak) and Br Stofner (Austrian). The mission was beginning to get on its feet after the initial setbacks arising from the harsh climate of the Valley which devastated the early personnel. Then in 1910 the Edict of Expulsion came from Portugal expelling all Jesuits from Portugal and its colonies. It was a devastating blow, for the mission was just beginning to prosper after a precarious start. Most of the 30 or so missionaries were told to return to Europe for re-assignment and some of them were missioned to the Portuguese-speaking mission of Brazil. However the three brothers, Rodenbücher, Longa and Stofner, all decided to stick together and, with a few Polish Jesuits, they crossed the Luangwa River and began afresh in the British Territory of Northern Rhodesia.

Initially it seemed as if the Austrian Province might take over the responsibility for the new mission, but it was soon accepted by the Polish Province. Br Rodenbuecher crossed over with Br Zurek (Pole) and went to the Boma in Feira to request a plot for a mission which they called Kapoche. Quickly a better site was designated at Katondwe which became the center of the new mission. Br Rodenbücher remained at Kapoche with the Austrian, Fr Moskopp and together they began building up a new station from scratch, in quite straitened circumstances. Although he was still young and vigorous, it was not easy to recommence all over again with their present limited resources.

It must have been painful for them to remember the great centers of Boroma and Miruru just a few miles away, on the other side of the river, which they were forced to abandon. After three years, Rodenbücher decided to return to his home province which had now become the independent Hungarian Province in 1909. He had completed twelve years in the demanding climate of the Zambezi Valley, nine in Mozambique and three in Northern Rhodesia. It was said that Fr Moskopp never quite got over his departure but he soldiered on for another ten years before passing away at the age of 54 in 1923. Perhaps it is truer to say that Kapoche was always a difficult mission materially and it also never really blossomed as a Christian center. Years later Kapoche was closed.

Br Rodenbuecher worked Hungary for many years and he passed away at the ripe age of 76 in Szeged on 29 October 1948.

29 October

25 February 1872 – 29 October 1948

Br. Estevão RODENBÜER (mostly known as Br. Mateus)

He was born in Németskér, Tolna, Hungary, on February 25, 1872 and entered the Society of Jesus on December 7, 1898, in the Austro-Hungarian Province. He went to Mozambique in 1901 where he worked in the missions of Boroma, Coalane and Miruro (Zumbo). He was master carpenter. He took his final vows on May 2, 1909. He left Mozambique after the Portuguese republican revolution. In 1912, he was assigned to work in the mission of Katóndue, Rhodesia. He died on October 29, 1948, in Szeged, Hungary.

(Cf. *Catalogus Defunctorum in renata Societate Iesu ab a. 1814 ad a. 1970*;
Cartas Edificantes da Província de Portugal S. J., II, p. 61 – 63)