

OUT OF THE HOLO(AUS)

by M. T. KELLUM

The impact of the Uganda Martyrs on our own age can be estimated only in eternal figures.

He fingered the yellowed cover with something like awe. This was the book the Blessed Charles Lwanga had used when he taught about the Man-God to the pages in the King's court.

"And when you go to Namugongo, the village of the executioners," the school-master was saying, "*step softly*. It is earth made holy by our *bazira*."

Twenty-two *bazira* (heroes) for Christ, and one of them — Kizito — was only a boy of his own age. There was a stirring deep inside the boy, George Sserwanga. He laid down the book and fixed fascinated eyes on the teacher. "... And when did they die because they would not commit sin with King Mwanga?" the teacher was continuing. "Less than one hundred years ago! It was between 1885 and 1887. Why, many people still live who knew our Martyrs well... After the persecution

there were only about four hundred Christians in Uganda. Today we are a Christian land with more than two million Catholics.... The fires of Sacrifice at Namugongo have truly lit up a great new fire of love of God."

It is difficult to pinpoint the moment when a religious vocation is born but Brother George Sserwanga believes the school master's talk that morning did much to foster his own. With eleven other seminarians from Uganda, he is studying for the priesthood at the College of Propaganda Fide in Rome. "Each of us has felt the force of the example given by those first witnesses to Christ in our country. How could we help it?" he says simply. "Their story lives. It is a part of our lives."

From the very beginning the Christians in Uganda have proved themselves to be apostolic. When

the missionaries, after only two years in that country, were forced to leave, the leaders among the first Christians kept the little flock together. In addition, they multiplied the converts so that when the missionaries were able to return they found the number of catechumens had swollen considerably. St. Matthias Mulumba Kalemba had an attendance of about two hundred at his home before he

died. Denis Ssebuggwawo and Pontian Ngondwe were killed in the act of teaching religion. Charles Lwanga, head of the king's numerous pages, taught them the Gospel with an enthusiasm that fired their spirit, and the proto-martyr, Joseph Mukasa, was the main prop of the young Christian community. It was through his influence that the missionaries were allowed to go back to Uganda. That was

'... The twenty-two Uganda Martyrs belong to our own times. They bridge a gap between the venerable North African Church of St. Cyprian and St. Augustine and the new Church of modern Africa.'



before King Mwangá's evil ways had turned him into a passionate despot.

The immediate followers of the Martyrs inherited this apostolic spirit. As early as 1897 Bishop Streicher, W. F. was able to start an organization among the chiefs to carry on an amazingly active apostolate. In 1930, this association became the official organ of Catholic Action under the name of *Kibina Kya Bajulizi* (Association of the Blessed Martyrs.)

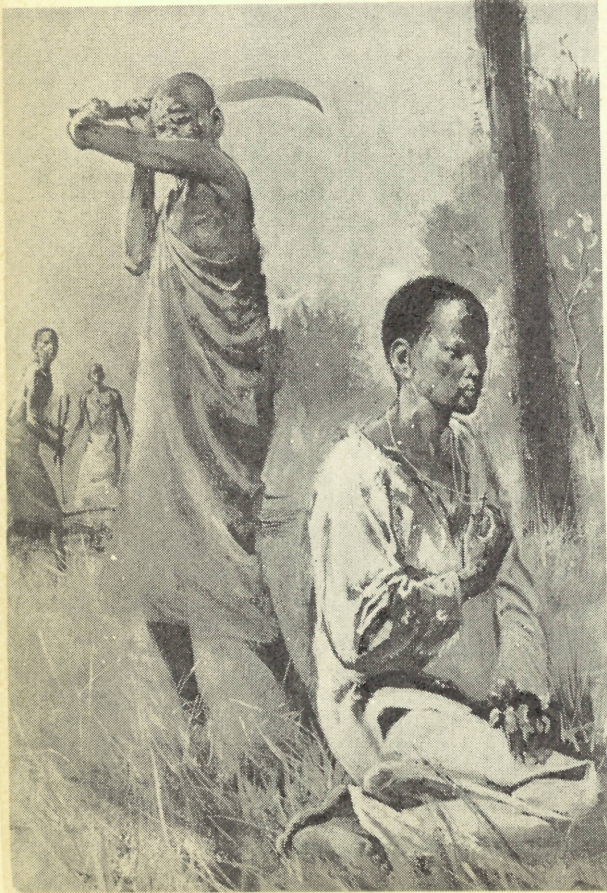
When, on June 22, 1934, Pope Pius XI declared Blessed Charles Lwanga the special patron of all Catholic African Youth Movements, every village in Uganda celebrated. Numerous effective forms of Catholic Action have begun under his patronage and there is a special religious society known as the *Ban-*

nakaroli (the Brothers of Charles Lwanga). More than 175 Brothers of this society teach in the schools and help to build missions not only in Uganda but in Tanganyika and other nearby countries.

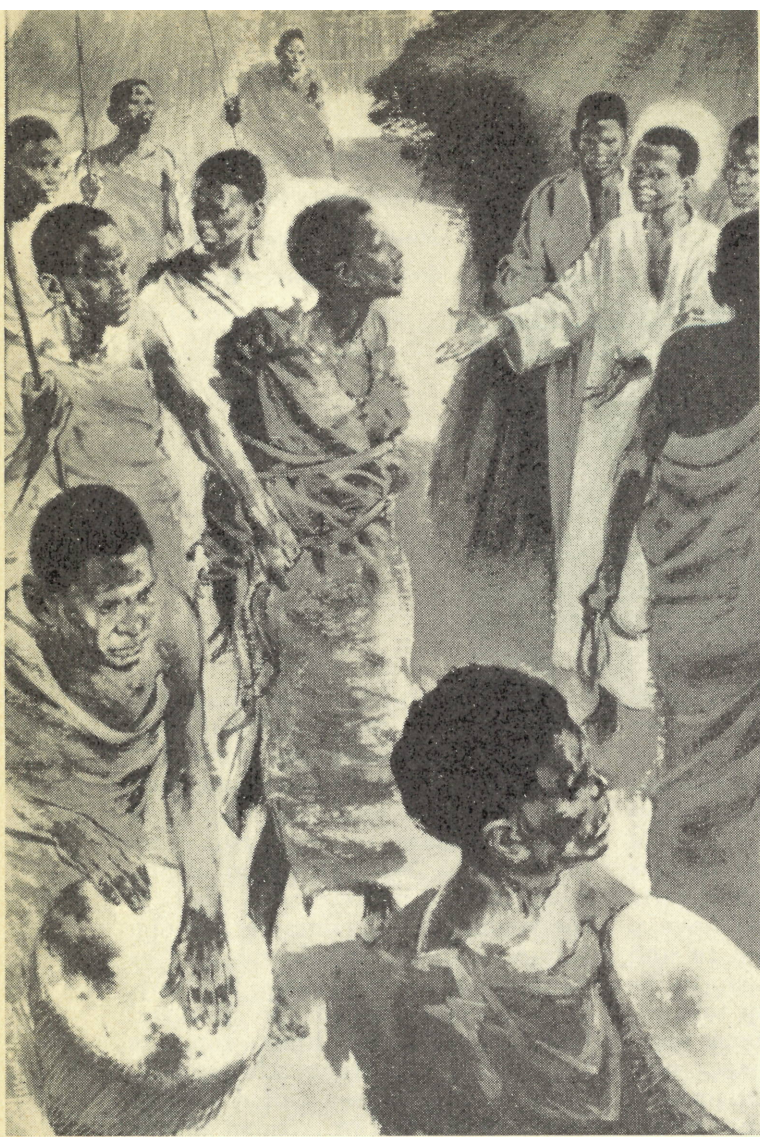
Three close relatives of this Martyr are priests in the Masaka diocese. Many relations of the other Martyrs are also in religion. The Archbishop of Rubaga, Joseph Kiwanuka, is himself a cousin of St. Luke Banabakinty, one of the first Catholics of Uganda. Just eleven days after the Canonization of the first African laymen, the Archbishop celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of his elevation to the episcopate at the "curia generale" of the White Fathers. He was the first of the modern African Bishops to be consecrated. Just to add to the list of "firsts" connected with this dynamic prelate, he initiated the first Pan-African Catechetical Meeting last August. It was held in Uganda under the direction of Father Johannes Hofinger, S. J.

A poignant story associated with the Canonization concerns Auguste Karema. Shortly after the death of the Martyrs, persecution broke out again in his village of Bujuni. Auguste was very young but he was well rooted in his Faith. Neither promises nor threats could make him deny Christ. They did not kill him but they put out his eyes. In spite of this handicap, he has been one of the leading catechists in the Buganda area for more than seventy years. When the White Fathers were building their major seminary, it was Auguste who prepared the mud to put between the bricks. The blind

Illustrations on these two pages are by René Follet.



The proto-martyr, S. Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, told his executioner, "Do not tie me. How could I escape, I who am going to die for my God?"



Reconciliation . . . At the time of departure for Namugongo, soldiers bring in a catechumen, S. Mukasa Kiriwawanvu, to join the group to be burned on the pyre. He had been sent to jail for a dispute with S. Gyavira (central figure). The quarrel is forgotten as they go together to die for Christ.

old man has become a tradition in his country, a symbol of those Witnesses to Christ whose force is felt now throughout the world. The beauty and blaze of lights in St. Peter's on October eighteenth was lost upon him. But Auguste had something else: the inner *wonder* of the moment which no movement of the crowd could dispel.

King Mwanga's daughter was present for the ceremony to honor these national heroes although she is not a Catholic. The present king

sent his brother to represent him. Two hundred pilgrims came from Uganda alone and others poured in from all over Africa. Many Catholic Youth Organizations sent delegates. In Ghana, the C.Y.O. ran a contest for the best essay on the Uganda Martyrs for school children in different age groups. Lucy Gockah, thirteen, who attends the Holy Child Secondary School in Cape Coast, won first prize in her group. The prize - a trip to Rome for the Canonization - left Lucy almost speechless with joy.



Archbishop Joseph
Kiwanuka of Rubaga greets
school children on a visit
to Switzerland.

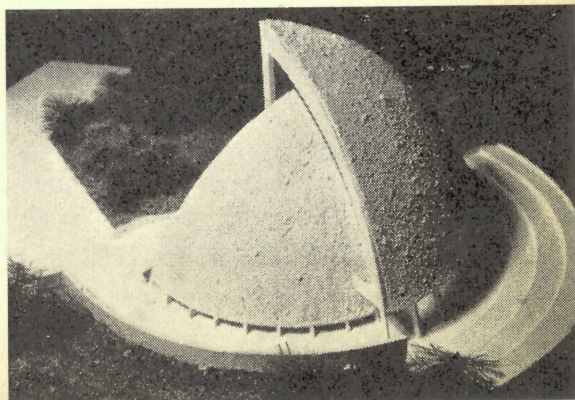
Special prayers in preparation for the great event in their history were begun in Uganda nearly a year ago. The Right Reverend Adrian K. Ddungu, Bishop of Masaka, promoted a series of missions last spring in his diocese and the idea spread to other parts of Uganda. "Our people have a blessed heritage to live up to and we must try to help them to be worthy of it," the Bishop told us. "In my own diocese alone more than three thousand marriages were straightened out during the preaching of the missions. Many, many people were converted from paganism and about eighty of them from Islamism.

"One old pagan of nearly ninety heard the priest speaking to the people in his village. That night he waited, lamp in hand, for the priest to pass his house on the way from the little church. 'I want to be baptized,' he said to the priest. 'My wife wants to be baptized. We want to believe in the God of those fine young men you talked about.' Instructions began the very next day for the old couple — at their age one could not afford to delay! They were received into

the Church and the first thing the old man did was to have four Masses of Thanksgiving offered."

Every branch of communication and the other arts has been used to disseminate the powerful message of the Martyrs. One of the most impressive works is that of the young African composer, Joseph Kyagambiddwe, of Uganda. The Reverend Father Antony Wouters, W. F., Postulator of the Martyrs' Cause, commissioned him to compose the "Ugandan Martyrs African Oratorio." It has been called a decisive step forward in African music. The text is written in the Luganda language, which is the common

Model of one of the churches to be erected at the different sites of execution. The birthplace of each of the Martyrs will also have a shrine.



Living martyr... Auguste Karema, who was blinded during the persecution, is led up to be introduced to the Holy Father.



tongue of most of the people in Uganda, and which requires individual musical treatment because of its inflections and accents. The Ngalabi and Mbûtu drums accompany the music, beating out rhythms that enhance the dramatic effect considerably. At the first performance, on the Thursday following the Canonization, the Oratorio received an ovation from an audience made up of many Conciliar Fathers,

pilgrims, and music lovers in general. Later, the performance was repeated in Northern Italy amidst enthusiastic *bravos*.

The Holy Father himself requested selections to be sung from the Oratorio during the private Audience he gave the African pilgrims. As he was carried into the great hall, hundreds of voices burst into song underscored by the rhythm of the drums. Hundreds of hands



The Ugandan seminarian, Brother George Sserwanga, visits the Holy Child mother house in Rome and meets the Rev. Mother General.



Pope Paul VI receives in a private audience the pilgrims from Uganda. At the Holy Father's feet are the prize-winning children from Ghana, including Lucy Gockah, who attends the Holy Child Secondary School at Cape Coast.

reached up to him. He was their Father, their hope, the Head of the Christian Family on earth. When Auguste, the blind catechist, was led up to the Holy Father to be presented, Pope Paul VI caught the deformed old hand in both of his. It was a moment framed in glory for the living martyr. The magnificent rosary which the Pope had given him hung about his neck . . . The prize-winning children from Ghana were also among those to be introduced in person to the Holy Father. Then they sat at his feet for the official picture.

When the Pope addressed the group, his words rang out with stirring emphasis: "Be faithful to the Church, following the example of the admirable heroes whom yesterday We raised to the Honors of the Altar. May their faith, their firmness, their courage, be a stimulus to you in your daily struggles. We entrust you with all Our heart to their heavenly protection while we think of all those in far-away Africa who are united with you in this moment by their prayer." And he gave them his paternal Apostolic Blessing.