

# A Step-by-Step Account of the Black Saints of Uganda

(Continued from Page 3)

The temporary home down the hill.

They explained their late arrival by disclosing that it was necessary for them to remain in the palace every night until the King had fallen asleep in order to be sure that none of the Catholic page boys were drawn into his orbit.

Father Lourdel was shocked to learn of the extent of Mwangi's moral decay. He was relieved, on the other hand, to know that the boys recognized their moral obligations and now steadfastly refused their depraved ruler.

He sighed sadly. "And I thought life was going to be so wonderful. It's going to be a hell."

There were early signs of it. Mwangi discarded his promise to build a new mission, and the White Fathers stayed on in their temporary home. The religious discussion never took place. Lourdel rarely saw Mwangi at all. Almost every night, Lourdel was awakened by the knock of some page boy who had been sent by the mission by Mwangi or Mukasa to get him beyond the reach of the King.



An Anglican chapel stands on the site where Catholic and Protestant Ugandans were martyred in 1884.

## The Terror Begins

The strife which previously existed between Lourdel and Mackay had been assuaged by their mutual concern for their young converts; the two men now were friends, meeting regularly to discuss the problems and make plans. In September, 1885, Mackay received news that a confere, James Hannington, a missionary on the coast, had been made Anglican bishop of East Africa and was on his way by caravan to inspect the Uganda section of his vast diocese.

He was traveling via the northern route, through Kenya, unaware of the Uganda legend that any strangers approaching from the north would conquer the country if they managed to cross the border.

Mackay wrote Hannington immediately urging him to arrive on the southern route, but his letter was too late. Meanwhile, news of the approaching northern caravan was transmitted over the network of tribal drums. One night, a page boy told King Mwangi and the Katikira to send troops north to intercept the caravan beyond the border and exterminate it. The boy told Mackay:

"Mackay rushed to Mwangi and pleaded that the order be rescinded. Mwangi was enraged that a private discussion in his personal quarters should become public knowledge, and he demanded to know who had told Mackay. When the missionary refused to identify his informant, Mwangi refused to rescind the order.

Mackay appealed to Lourdel. The priest perceived that the best way to handle the King was to treat him like a little girl, so he spoke gently to Mwangi, affectionately, flattering him, humoring him, until at last he coyly agreed to call off the troops.

If he did, the order was not carried out. On October 30, Bishop Hannington, his train cook, and the forty Africans in the caravan were murdered. One African, skimming death, escaped.

Lourdel and Mackay stormed Mwangi with protests, and there was a great, sudden resentment among all the Christians. The realization that his people were turning against him incensed Mwangi. Returning to a previous complaint, he demanded of Mackay: "I insist that you name the man who told you about the decision made in the privacy of my court."

"The whole country knew of it within an hour," Mackay replied.

"Then let the whole country know this," Mwangi said. "You are the next white man I will kill."

Lourdel said, "You have called me your father and your friend, Mwangi, and I have tried to be, but I assure you that if you kill me, Mackay, will leave your country."

Mwangi turned on him. "Do you think that if I killed Mackay, I would spare you? Then he told the Katikira to forbid any of my people to go to the white men's houses. Kill any one who does."

Chances were that, unstable, volatile, as he was, Mwangi would have repeated in a few weeks, the storm would have passed, and gradually the people would have returned to the missions. But then one of these coincidences occurred which from time to time change the course of history.

A few days later, Mwangi fell desperately ill. Joseph Mukasa knew that the only man in the country with the proper medicine to treat the King was Father Lourdel, and he suggested that the priest be summoned. Mwangi was uncertain. Lourdel would not come because of their argument. Joseph assured him that Lourdel did not carry grudges and that most likely he was merely awaiting a sign that the King was no longer angry.

"Very well, then," Mwangi

asked him to forgive me and call him to bring his medicine.

By morning, Mwangi was well, but during the night, he had suffered severe pain. And now it was this that he remembered. With a pagan mentality that required specific causes for specific effects, he tried to figure out what he or who else had done to bring on such anguish that he thought he would die.

It did not occur to him that the pain might have been a result of the medicine as it did in the case of such ailments. He had heard that perhaps Father Lourdel might try to poison him. His reasoning took him back further into the development of the incident, back to the moment when some new cause was introduced, bringing on the terrible pain.

How hollow the moment when Joseph Mukasa suggested the specific medicine. So Joseph Mukasa had done this. Mukasa tried to kill him. And why did he do this? He said he and the King had argued about the Catholic boys. Mukasa had hidden the boys from the King when ordered to produce them. Anyone that disobeyed a royal command would die.

Moreover, couldn't he have told Mukasa, with his freedom of the palace, who had overheard the conversation about the missionaries? He would have said that the missionaries had overheard the conversation. He would have said that the missionaries had overheard the conversation.

And there was this repeated: Father Lourdel had spoken of his hopes for a Christian mission in Africa, with a Christian King. Who would that Christian King be? Mukasa — the Christian, the Catholic. Oh, how could Mwangi have been so unaware of his enemies in his own house!

Mwangi worked himself into a frenzy. He tried to kill Mackay, but he was too late. He tried to kill Mackay, but he was too late. He tried to kill Mackay, but he was too late.

This was a burst of confusion among the chiefs only. Mwangi seemed calm, but his eyes were wild. "If the King says I am to die, I die," he said.

"You know you deserve it," Mwangi said. "You are a liar, an assassin, a deluded idiot, a thief who thinks he can steal my throne."

"I am none of those things," Mwangi said. "A Catholic."

"If you were nothing else, you would be bad enough."

"So I am to die because of my religion?"

"Your religion is at the root of it."

"Then I die happily for my religion. I would die happily for my religion."

"Your conduct hasn't given me any impression."

"Your Majesty sees only what he wants to see."

It was protocol that no matter how briefly the King left his compound, he was to be welcomed back formally. When Mwangi returned from hunting, there was no one at the gate to greet him.

Floued, he asked, "Where is everybody?"

Kigwa explained: "No one saw you go out, sire. That is why there is no one here."

"That's a lie," Mwangi said. "They all know I was away. They do it all the time. I used to be king around here, but now it looks as if the white men are."

Mwangi was the Katikira's son, and he was angry. He was angry. He was angry. He was angry.

"With Denis?"

"And what were you doing?"

"He was teaching me religion."

"You know that is against my orders?"

"Yes, sire."

"Did your father send you here to learn religion or to serve me?"

"To serve you, sire."

"You have not done that, have you?"

"As well as my religion permit, sire."

"Are you already a Catholic?"

"No, but I hope the Father will baptize me soon."

"You know that you will be baptizing both your own father and me?"

"I'm afraid, I must."

Mwangi gripped his chair to control his temper. He turned to Denis. "You are the nephew of the Katikira, aren't you?"

"He is the chief of my clan."

"Is it the custom among your people to disobey your chief?"

"No, sire."

"But you did."

"How, sire?"

"By becoming a Catholic."

"He asked me about my religion, sire, so I've been telling him."

"Despite my orders against exactly that?"

"Yes."

"You know what I do to people who disobey me, don't you?"

"You kill them, sire."

"Then you are not surprised that I am going to kill you, are you?"

The boy said nothing.

Mwangi said: "When you leave this room, you will go to the executioner and tell him you are to be killed. Do you understand?"

The boy nodded, terrified. He turned.

"Just a moment," Mwangi said. "I haven't dismissed you yet." He stood up and took a lance from a nearby guard and broke it over the boy's shoulder. "Now you may go." Then he turned on Mwangi and hit his face with all his strength. The boy slid across the room, teeth dropped from his mouth. "Go and show your friends what I have done, and tell them I have only started."

Then Mwangi told the guards: "Lock the gates. No Christian will get out of here tonight."

On his way to his quarters, Mwangi came upon a young man named Honorat, who with Charles Lwanga, was a director of the royal household. "You are a Christian, aren't you?" Mwangi asked.

"You know me, master," Honorat said. "You know I am."

To the guards at his heels, Mwangi said curly, "Cast him out."

"The Catholic?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Send them both to me when you find them."

An hour later, Mwangi and Denis Sebaggawa, both in their teeth, stood before the King, with weary impatience, Mwangi said: "Mwangi, where have you been?"

"With Denis."

"And what were you doing?"

"He was teaching me religion."

"You know that is against my orders?"

"Yes, sire."

"Did your father send you here to learn religion or to serve me?"

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Going on, Mwangi glanced into a supply hut and saw another youth. He called, "Aren't you a Christian, too?"

"I have taken the religion of Mr. Mackay," the young man said.

"Come here then."

In his hand Mwangi still held part of the lance he had used on Denis Sebaggawa. He beat the young man in the face with it until blood poured from open wounds, and when he fell to the ground, the King kicked him until he lost consciousness.

In the pages' barracks, the Christian boys gathered around Charles Lwanga to hear him relate what they already knew: the King was on a rampage which might mean the death of all of them. "Your only chance," he said, "is to deny your religion."

"I'll never do that." The boy who spoke was Abago-Tuzindo, nephew of the chief executioner. The others quickly agreed with him.

"I hoped you'd say that," Lwanga said. "Then we have decided. We will stick together now, no matter what happens. Don't be afraid, whatever the King does to us. We would be better off dead than to lose our souls just to please him."

In the morning, there was great activity. All the chiefs had been called to the palace for a special session. The pages were ordered to present themselves to Mwangi for judgment.

Executioners holding Denis Sebaggawa postponed their task because they thought he, being the Katikira's nephew, might be reprieved. But when no word came, they took him into the

(Continued on Page 6)



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