

With every
good wish,

Edmund Galley

Bananas with Everything

by Liz.

A short biography of one lay missionary whose
work in Uganda eventually led to the founding
of the Volunteer Missionary Movement.

THE VOLUNTEER MISSIONARY MOVEMENT
1, VICTORIA ROAD, LONDON, N.W.7.

EDWINA GATELEY : lay missionary.

Edwina Gateley comes from Lancaster and from about the age of sixteen had the intention of going out to Africa to work as a teacher; her intention of going to work abroad goes back much further and she cannot, in fact, trace its origins, nor can she really explain why eventually she decided on Africa. She is a practising Catholic with a strong commitment to the African people in particular. She took the first step towards becoming a missionary on Sunday, 13th September 1959 when she spoke to a missionary priest, Fr. Ratho, W.F. after Mass; he gave her an address to which she could write for particulars about how to become a missionary. She was advised to qualify as a teacher first.

Educational situation in Uganda

When she was twenty-one (in 1964), six weeks after qualifying as a teacher at Sedgely Park College of Education, she went out to Uganda where there is, as in most African countries, a desperate shortage of teachers.⁶ It is estimated that only about 6% of the children of secondary school age got secondary education at that time. Miss Gateley spent her first year in a relatively well-equipped and well-organised secondary school and then she felt ready

⁶At the UNESCO Conference of African States on the Development of Education, held at Addis Ababa in May 1961, it was stated that literacy of the school-age population of children could be as low as 2% in some countries and that "only three out of every hundred children see the inside of a secondary school".

to go into the 'bush', to get to know the Africans in a way she would be unlikely to do while living with Europeans, to learn their language and to set up a secondary school for girls. Because of the great shortage of secondary schools in Uganda, only a tiny proportion of those who pass the qualifying examination at the end of their Primary education can actually find places in a Secondary school: there is keen competition for the available places, even though the successful applicants have to pay £40 a year school fees – a very large sum of money to an African father who is likely to earn only about 10/- a week. The money is found somehow, usually by borrowing from relatives in the extended family common in Africa.

Miss Gateley's 'bush' school

Miss Gateley was eventually given permission to use the old Primary school building in Kyamaganda; a large, ramshackle building with a concrete floor, long low benches in one room and beds three inches apart in the other room: in this building everyone would sleep and be taught; it had to be a boarding school because the 68 pupils came from a radius of 100 miles. A year later about 70 more were chosen from about 250 applicants. There was no electricity (gasolfin lamps were used), no running water; this had to be fetched from a swamp one mile away; no equipment and very few books; the newest books were 15 years old and some were 100 years old. There were no other teachers and the nearest Europeans were 20 miles away; there was no form of transport.

The pupils themselves were aged between 17 and 18 and they had only the elementary knowledge of English which they had learned in their Primary schools. The aim was to get them up to Cambridge G.C.E. 'O' level, in four years, if possible. Miss Gateley taught them English Language, English Literature (including Shakespeare which they came to love!), Art, Religious Knowledge, History and Natural. An African boy who had already taken his G.C.E. 'O' level taught them Mathematics, Health Science and Geography.

After one year, Miss Gateley felt the need for another qualified teacher to help her and she believed that there must be other students like herself who would accept the challenge of teaching in Africa, after they had qualified. She wrote a great many letters to Colleges of Education in England, as a result of which three more teachers went out to Uganda - one (there was accommodation for one only) to Kyamaganda itself and the others to other schools in the area. Ita, the new teacher, took over the teaching of Mathematics and Games, and also began to teach the children French. The pupils reached 'O' level standard, some gaining distinctions; one successful pupil with seven 'O' levels is now a delighted air-hostess! By the time Miss Gateley left, they were putting on their own productions of "Hamlet" and "Cinderella", painting enthusiastically and writing poetry. The school, moved to new buildings in Nkoasi, is now officially recognised by the Uganda Government.

Some of you may query the validity of an English curriculum. Miss Gateley had no say in deciding what should be taught. There may indeed be a need

for the 'Africanisation' of curricula, relevant textbooks and for a more technical and agricultural bias. English is important as the language of communication with the outside world and also among people from different tribes in the country itself, because Africa has between 500 and 1,000 different African languages.

Other work

In addition to her work in the 'bush' school itself, Miss Gateley began to try to teach English to the younger children who did not go to school, teaching them outside and writing the words in the sand; in return, they taught her their own language, Luganda. She also agreed to teach Art to some enthusiastic boys in a school 30 miles away: she was fetched by car at 9 o'clock on Saturday morning and brought back (via Masaka so that she could do her shopping) at 6 o'clock in the evening. This was after her own recently acquired car had ended up in a swamp! She could not really afford to run it anyway. Sometimes on Sundays she hired a big lorry to take the children to give a concert in a leper colony 32 miles away. She also took 150 of them (the numbers had grown by then) camping for two weeks. They slept in huts constructed by themselves from elephant grass and bamboo; Miss Gateley's own hut appeared to be in imminent danger of collapse. She taught the children to swim in the lake and they also did jobs for elderly people living in isolation in the area - clearing their compounds, cutting down food, cultivating their plantations and re-thatching roofs.

Food

The staple food was green bananas (steamed, with either peanut or tomato sauce, and sometimes Miss Gatsley's own invention - fried). They grew plentifully in the school plantations and getting school lunch means going and cutting down great bunches of them, peeling them with a sharp panga and steaming them for three hours over boiling water in a big tin cooking pot. Once a week, on Saturday, Miss Gatsley walked two miles to the road and hitched a lift to Masaka where she bought bacon and eggs to cook on her primitive stove as a special weekend treat.

About once a month, she hitched a lift 24 miles to the nearest mission hospital (Medical Missionaries of Mary), to have a bath and to eat real English food such as cornflakes! Another change of diet was the result of invitations to visit African homes, a particular delicacy being fried ants and grasshoppers. The cow-boy daily brought beer bottles full of thin milk but the bugs visibly swimming in it eventually led to a cancellation of the order. Water was fetched from the swamp about a mile away and that also was infected and should have been boiled for six minutes and filtered: as a result of drinking this water unfiltered, Miss Gatsley eventually became ill; realising that this was more than the usual attack of malaria, she hitched a lift to the hospital, where she was found to be very seriously ill with a high fever.

Narrow escapes

The illness proved difficult to diagnose and treat. She was in hospital for six weeks, during which time

a rebellion broke out involving the Kabaka of Uganda, Mutesa II. There was shooting in the area. A few weeks later, when Miss Gatsley was consulting in the house of a European government teacher, she herself narrowly escaped a bullet which actually shattered the post office window, in front of which she had been standing a moment before; she had been sending a telegram to her mother in Lancaster to say that she was safe. In actual fact, the telegram was the first her mother knew about the danger she had been in! She had a number of other narrow escapes while in Uganda, surviving an earthquake, a stampeding herd of buffalo and being charged by a war-bog, which had been shot and dropped dead a few feet from her after having charged for about 200 yards!

Beginning the V.M.M. (Volunteer Missionary Movement)

Miss Gatsley came home on leave (and also to do her year's probationary teaching) in January 1967; she intended to continue to try to find more teachers to go out to Africa but she became increasingly aware of the need to offer them some form of training and preparation before they went out. Between September 1966 and October 1968, she privately sent out twenty-eight volunteers to mission schools in Africa, intending to return herself at the earliest opportunity. She worked hard, for twelve months, with little apparent success, to get the Church's official backing and financial support for lay missionaries (i.e. those missionaries not belonging to any religious order or secular institute) and for the acceptance of the principle that the organisation should be entirely lay. Finding little

but moral encouragement, enthusiasm for the idea and vague promises of help once she had, by some unspecified means (!) managed to set up an organisation on her own, she decided to accept the offer of Bishop Ddungu of Masaka to sponsor her return to his diocese; this was in October 1968. In January 1969, she received a letter from the Secretary to the Missionary Commission in London stating that six of the major missionary orders in England had met and agreed to sponsor the type of organisation which she wished to found: they invited her to return to England to organise it.

Since its headquarters, at 1 Victoria Road, London N.W.7, opened in April 1969, it has grown rapidly under the name of the Volunteer Missionary Movement. The first four-week residential training course was held in October 1969 at its Lay Missionary Centre, Oak Lodge, Totteridge Lane, London N.20, and it was a great success. The training course is open to volunteers and missionaries going out with other organisations, as well as V.M.M., and there were three from other organisations on the first course.

V.M.M. in the developing world

By the end of 1970 the V.M.M. had 72 lay missionaries in thirteen different countries : Ethiopia, West Cameroons, Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, Zambia, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Mauritius, Malaysia and Korea.