

# TEKAKWITHA

Pember, Julia.  
Kateri Tekakwitha  
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*Nihil Obstat:*

ARTHUR J. SCANLAN, S.T.D.,  
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✠ FRANCIS J. SPELLMAN, D.D.,  
*Archbishop of New York.*

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# Kateri Tekakwitha

The Lily of the Mohawks

*By*

JULIA PEMBER

Illustrated by Mother Fiske, R.S.C.J.

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“Kateri had her naps swinging from a tree.”

## Kateri Tekakwitha

ONCE there was a little Indian saint whose name was Tekakwitha.

When she was a wee papoose she lived with her father and mother in a village, far away in grand and beautiful woods and beside a pretty river. The village was called Auriesville.

It was not at all like our villages now, for she lived there nearly three hundred years ago, when everything was wild. The houses were made of logs and were without chimneys or windows or doors to shut. There were no streets or sidewalks. This village had a high fence around it to keep away enemy Indians; and it was hard to find it, too, because it was hidden in the trees.

Tekakwitha's *anna* (that is Indian for mother) wrapped her in a pretty red blanket so that one could see only her sweet brown face and her two black eyes, like beads. Her hair was straight and black. Anna sewed two red feathers on the blanket on top of her head for a cap. She was tied to a cradle-board so that she couldn't fall off, and she had her naps swinging from a tree, or anywhere that *anna* put her. Anna always carried her on

her back when she went out, just as all Indian mothers carried their little papooses then.

When she could walk she played with the other Indian children. They had such fun in the woods and in the river, in summer, but they had the deep snow and the ice for sports in the winter. They walked out to the edge of the forest to see the big moose, and the elk with their great antlers, which look like bushes without leaves. The fuzzy-wuzzy animals chuckled at them from the trees and blinked at them from their house-holes in the ground. Indian boys and girls can talk to the animals. They understand animal language. God was always there. He makes the creatures happy in the beautiful forest which is their home. He made it for them to live in.

Tekakwitha's father went hunting and brought her handsome furs to wear. She looked like a roly-poly bear herself in her best coat. Her bed was all made of furs, too, just as all Indians' beds are. O, how cozy and warm it was on the bitter winter nights when the trees outside snapped with the frost and the men came in dripping with icicles—like Santa Claus!

There was no church there at all, no Mass, no Tabernacle, no Stations, and these Indians knew nothing about them. They were heathen. But wait! Yes, there was one who

knew, and that was Tekakwitha's anna. Anna knew the faith because when she was a little girl herself she lived a long way off, at Three Rivers. Some holy priests there told her about it. It was called "the Prayer." But there was a terrible war and anna was carried away captive by some wild Indians. Then Tekakwitha's father found her and brought her to Auriesville. She always loved her Prayer and she wanted so very much to have Tekakwitha baptized. But before she could manage it another dreadful thing happened. All the family fell sick and anna died. Then father died. And after him her papoose brother died. Poor little Tekakwitha! She was very sick, too, and was left all alone, and she was not baptized! But she got better. Her eyes never got quite well and they pained her all the rest of her life.

Never mind! God was taking care of her. Just wait and see.

### She Goes to Live With Her Uncle and Aunt

**N**OW Tekakwitha had to go to live in a new place, in a new home with her uncle and aunt. Her uncle was a Chief. He was Chief of the Turtles, an Indian tribe. He wore a red and black blanket with black and white



and red feathers round his head and hanging down his back. He had red war-paint on his face and his teeth were the longest ones you ever saw, and they were brown. His eyes were narrow, and they glittered. You may be sure that every one in the tribe obeyed him—Chief Great Wolf! Tekakwitha wasn't a bit afraid of him because that is the way that most chiefs looked and she was used to them. Besides, he was very nice to her and brought

her beads for her necklace. He paddled her on the river in his canoe and gave her rides on the big moose's back. Her aunt was a nice squaw and took good care of her.

But they didn't know anything about the Prayer and Baptism. They hadn't even heard of them. So Tekakwitha thought of them all by

herself, and she wished, and she wished that she had anna's baptism. She went out all alone to the



“Her uncle was a chief . . .”



forest where it is so beautiful, and all silent, except for the singing of the tall pine trees. The fir and the sweet fern sent out their fragrance. God is in His forest. She stood very still listening for Him. God loved the little soul and He spoke to her. Here, great God spoke to a little Indian girl and told her about Himself. She learned to love Him and she found out how to please Him all her life long. Would God give her baptism some day? She believed that He would. She would wait until He did.

### Tekakwitha's School

**T**HE time came for her to go to school. But O, no! not to schools like ours. Because there were no schools there. Her squaw aunt taught her. She learned how to cut down little trees and how to plant and to hoe corn. Then she learned how to crush the corn between two stones and to make it into flour; and after that, to cook the flour into a dish called sagamité. Sagamité is a little like our corn pudding but not so nice. The Indians put in little scraps of mouse, or frog, or something like that, to flavor it. You would not like their cooking at all; they were very bad cooks, but they didn't know any better then.

Her favorites were her embroidery lessons. She worked lovely things on leather in pat-

terns, with shells and beads and porcupine quills. Her Indian suit and her moccasins were just beautiful and she made them all herself.

### The Blackrobes Come to the Village

**T**EKAKWITHA grew to be a big girl. She wore her hair in two long black braids, and she had a band of wampum round her forehead.

One warm afternoon she and some other girls went to a spring to get water. They were having a very nice time when they heard a great rumpus on the beach. There was splashing and shouting, honking and squealing; dogs were barking. What was the matter? The girls dashed down the trail to find out. Everyone was on the beach and a big canoe was coming very fast across the river. There were three men in it. They wore no blankets nor feathers but they were dressed in long, black robes. One of them was honking a large shell made like a horn:

**HONK! HONK! HONK! H-O-N-K!!!**

“Blackrobes! Blackrobes!” shouted everyone. A lot of men pushed out their canoes and paddled fast to meet them. They nearly swamped Blackrobes’ canoe. The Blackrobes laughed heartily and when they reached the shore they took out handfuls of pretty beads



“Blackrobes!  
Blackrobes!”

from their pockets to give all round. Even the little papooses had some. Tekakwitha had a lovely green one.

Now the big Chief Turtle stepped forward with his arms folded. He looked very grand and imposing and there was silence. He spoke slowly to the Blackrobes.

“Sago, Ka-loo-loo-moo-ke!” he said (that means “welcome”). “Who are you? why have you come here?”

“We are priests called Jesuits,” answered the Blackrobes, “and we have come to tell you about God, and about His Son Jesus, and about Heaven.”

“Ka-loo-loo-moo-ke. We like to hear about the Great Spirit and Heaven. Come to my long-house.”

They went to his long-house and sat down upon some mats. The squaws brought them three bowls of sagamité to eat. Each one had a small squirrel’s foot floating on the top.

“No thank you!” they said.

Big Chief was sorry. “They are afraid of us,” he thought. So he got up and took all his arrows and threw them into the fire to burn them up. This was to show that he wouldn’t hurt the Blackrobes for anything. They understood him and smiled, and, to be very polite, they ate all the sagamité in their bowls, although they really did not like it.

“Thank you. God bless you,” they said.

Big Chief invited them to stay at the long-house, so they stayed there for three days. All day long they taught the people about our Lord. Tekakwitha did all the cooking and the serving, and they said they had never seen such a sweet girl, for she did all the work she could and she never talked or made a noise. She watched the Fathers when they were praying and then she tried to pray like them. She learned how to make the Sign of the Cross and how to kneel down.

At the end of the three days the Blackrobes had to go away, but they were very sorry and

promised to come back. The Indians wanted them to come. The whole village went to the beach to see them off and as the canoes pushed out they said, "Mid-wid-hamin!" which means "remember me."

## A Trial

"TEKAKWITHA," said Uncle Great Wolf one day, "I have found a husband for you to marry. He is big and strong and will go hunting for me when I don't want to go."

"O, no, Tekakwitha said. "Thank you. I am never going to be married. I am going to be like the Blackrobes. They have only God to love and to work for. That is why I want to be like them. So I will not have a husband."

Uncle Chief was very angry. He growled a lot of Indian that we don't know and stamped round the long-house like an ogre. Tekakwitha was so sorry, because she was fond of her Uncle and she had never made him angry before. But God comes first.

"I will do a great deal more work for you and I will go hunting, too. But I can never be married because I have promised to God that I will not." She was crying now. Uncle was furious and talked Indian very fast while he brandished his tomahawk. It was a *very* unpleasant scene.

After that Tekakwitha stayed in to do

more and more work. It was dark inside, as there were no windows, but all the time she was talking, talking with God in the Light within her soul.

### She Said, No

**T**HAT evening Tekakwitha was sitting on a little bench in her long-house. She was very tired, but she had finished all her work. Someone came in. It was a very handsome young Indian, and she knew that he was the one whom her Uncle had chosen for her to marry.

He did not speak but he slowly sat down beside her on the bench. The custom among Indians, at that time, was for a young man to call upon the young lady whom he wished to marry, and do no more than sit down beside her. So this was what the handsome Indian meant, "Tekakwitha, will you marry me?" Now if Tekakwitha meant to say "YES" she would have taken a bowl of sagamité to the young man. That was the way to say "Yes." But she didn't. It was a very hard moment for her, for her Uncle was crouched in a corner, ready to jump out, and his eyes were glittering. But after a few seconds, she slowly rose, drew her blanket about her, and then she went out into the night. That meant, "NO! NO! NO!"



## Something Very Cruel

THESE Indians were very bad sometimes and very, very cruel because they had never had holy Church to tell them any better.

One morning some of them came home from a fight bringing a boy whom they had captured. They put the boy on a platform in the middle of the village, with his feet and hands tied. They began to torture him with sticks and knives, and all the people came to watch and to make fun of him, too. They threw mud and stones at him. Then they did the worst thing; they made him run up and down on red hot stones. It was dreadfully cruel. The boy wouldn't cry or say one word, he pretended that he didn't feel it. That is what Indians do. This boy was a Christian. Now there was a Christian Indian lady living near. She heard what they were doing and ran to the platform. She asked the Indians to please give the boy to her. "I will give you some pretty beads if you will sell him to me," she said. The Indians took the beads and ran away to hide.

The kind Indian Christian thought that the boy was dead now, as he had fallen down. But some people helped her to pick him up and to carry him to her long-house. She took such good care of him that he lived and got quite well.





“It was a lovely white cross . . .”

### *Next Day*

### Tekakwitha's Cross

**T**EKAKWITHA went into the forest by the river. The sky was blue through the trees and she could hear the water laughing over the rapids. All else was quite still. Indians are always silent in the forest,—they listen . . . listen . . . She was still, too, and was at her prayer. She was praying about our

Lord on the Cross, and thinking over the things the priest had said about Him.

She saw a beautiful little birch-tree growing close to the water. Its bark was pure white. She went up to it and spoke to it.

“Little birch-tree, little birch-tree,” she said, “will you give yourself to be a pure white cross for Jesus?”

The little birch-tree shook its leaves gently in the sunshine to mean,

“Yes, I will give myself to be a pure white cross for Jesus.”

She cut down the little tree and made two sticks. These she tied together with the band of wampum from her forehead to make a cross. She dug a hole in the ground and planted it upright. It was a lovely white cross.

Then she looked in the deep, soft moss under the hemlock trees and found red bunchberries smiling up to her from their green leaf collars. They looked like red blood.

“Little red berries, little red berries,” she said, “will you give your red blood to love Jesus?”

The berries couldn't move, but they shone their eyes to mean, “Yes, we will give our red blood to love Jesus.”

She gathered a beautiful red garland of

them and placed them at the foot of the white cross.

Then she spoke to herself and said, "Tekakwitha, the white birch-tree gave itself to be a pure white cross for Jesus, the bunchberries gave their red blood to love Jesus. Will Tekakwitha give herself to be a pure white cross for Jesus? will she give herself to be a garland of love for Jesus?"

"Yes! yes! she would gladly do that for the love of Jesus!"

That is what she said at the foot of her cross.

### Something Very Happy

**L**ONG winter came, and long winter passed and then spring brought some more Fathers to teach the Indians. This time they stayed, and soon they began to build a little church out of logs. Everyone came to watch them at work and a few helped. There was a great crowd of braves, squaws, papooses, dogs, pet coons and all the rest.

One of the girls got near to a priest and touched his sleeve. "What is your name?" she said.

"My name is Father de Lamberville," he answered.

Tekakwitha said his name softly over and over to herself, but she was too shy to speak

to him. She came to Doctrine every day when he rang the bell.

Presently a lot of Indians were baptized, but poor little Tekakwitha was not among them; she was too afraid to ask, so she was left out.

Do you remember the story of the poor lame man at the pool who was not healed because he could never get to the water in time? Our Lord found it out and He was so sorry that He made the man well Himself. Our Lord knew how afraid His little Indian girl was, and so He helped her, too. This is how it was.

The people of the village had gone to pick corn and grapes one day, and Tekakwitha was all alone in the long-house. Her eyes were too sore for her to go out that day. Father de Lamberville went by. He didn't see her. But his guardian angel pulled and pulled him. What was the matter? He went back to see and there was the little girl sitting in the long-house. She was sewing. He went in.

How glad Tekakwitha was! She told him all about anna and all she knew about the Doctrine—and, "Please," she said, "may I be baptized some day?" Father de Lamberville listened to it all and then he promised to baptize her next Easter.

## The Church Bell

**T**HE priests had a little bell for a church bell. They said that the Indians must all come for Doctrine when they heard it ring. That was what it was for. One of the priests held it up and rang it. The Indians laughed and clapped their hands because they had never seen a bell before. When he put it down they all crowded round to feel it, and they put their ears close to it to hear where the sound came from. But, Oh! one boy snatched it and ran down the street with it. The priest was so quick that he jumped over the fence and ran round the long-house and caught him at the corner, bell and all. He got it away from him. Everyone laughed at the fun and the Blackrobes laughed harder than all. They told the boy that if he did not miss Doctrine all the next day he might ring it in the morning. The boy came before breakfast and stayed all day long for Doctrine. So, of course, he did ring it!





The Christmas Crib.

## Christmas

**T**HE white snow fell again and brought the most beautiful Christmas that these Indians had ever known. They had the Holy Child in the Crib for the first time.

They cut down green trees for the chapel and gathered bright red berries for decoration. They brought their best furs to hang on the walls and to spread on the floor because they wanted to make it snug and warm for the Baby Jesus. It was all furry and green and shining red, and it smelled exactly like



our Christmas. Tekakwitha and some girls made the sweetest little cradle-board for the Baby Jesus. They made a halo, and a big star, too, of porcupine quills of every color. It was all just beautiful.

It was snowing hard on Christmas Eve, but all the Indians folded their blankets about them and put on their best furs to go to Midnight Mass. They came silently through the forest in the dim blue of the snow-light to worship at the Crib. It was radiant inside. They all knelt straight upright and listened to the words of the priest, bringing our Lord down to His Altar Throne.

Just think of our Great God; He, Who made the earth and the stars and is worshiped by angels in Heaven, . . . He loved to come down here to be a little Papoose so that He might be among His Indians in their deep, beautiful forest!

The Indians sang to Him. Guess what they sang!

“O come let us adore Him,  
O come let us adore Him,  
O come let us adore Him,  
Christ the Lord!”

Wouldn't you like to have been there, too?





“An arch . . . for Tekakwitha to walk through . . .”

## Tekakwitha Is Baptized and Has a New Name Given to Her

**S**HE was trying very hard to be good. The Indians knew that she was going to be baptized and whenever they saw her they said, “There goes the sweetest girl we have ever known.” That was quite true; she was.

At last the snow went away and the spring gently called everything back to life in the woods. Easter came, too, bringing to Tekak-

witha her glad Baptism-day. Again the Indians dressed the chapel with their best furs. There were long white candles on the altar to bring light to the risen Jesus. Some boys ran miles to find the first spring flowers and came back bringing lovely hepaticas, arbutus and daphne. Daphne flowers bloom on long slender branches. They are shell-pink and have no leaves with them. They made a long arch of these branches before the church door for Tekakwitha to walk through. The chapel was a spring-garden all sweet with joy for the risen Lord Jesus, Who died for us, and Who came back to give us Life again at Easter.

Tekakwitha went to the chapel before it was light so that she could pray alone. When the time came for the baptism crowds of Indians came to see. There were no seats in the chapel so they all knelt upright, straight and still and listened to the voice of the priest. They heard the trickle of the water and the holy words of baptism.

She was God's own child now and His Life had come into her soul. Everyone said "Our Father" and "Hail Mary" in Indian, and then they sang some Indian hymns.

She had a new name given to her, KATERI. This name means white, or pure. That is why we often call her now the LILY OF THE MOHAWKS. (The Mohawks were her nation.)

Kateri was so happy that she wanted to stay always with our Lord in the chapel. But she couldn't, because she had to do her work. She came back whenever she could.

## Trouble

**N**OW the old devil was all stirred up to hate because Kateri had been taken away from him and had been made the child of our Lord. So he thought of a lot of ways to torment her. In the first place he told her uncle not to go to the Prayer. Uncle was very silly and listened to him. He became very disagreeable, too.

Kateri had to stay in and just work — work — work — like Cinderella. When she went to church on Sunday she couldn't have any breakfast nor any dinner. But she went, just the same.

The bad children who didn't attend Doctrine were very rude and cruel, too, for when she passed by they laughed and called out, "Christian, Christian!" and they hissed. But she never answered back, because our Lord never answered back when He was insulted and all the time she was trying to be like Him.

One day she was sitting alone in her house with her sewing. Suddenly an Indian jumped



“When she passed they called out ‘Christian, Christian,’ and hissed . . .”

in waving a tomahawk. “Give up being a Christian or I’ll kill you,” he said.

That was terrible! He really meant to kill her. But Kateri would not change for him, she bowed her head, and she answered him, “You can take away my life, but you cannot take away my faith.” The Indian thought this so very brave that he would let her live. He admired her. He ran out of the house and never hurt her at all.

## Kateri Goes Away

**T**HE Fathers were so sorry that Kateri was persecuted for her faith. They wondered what they could do, and they prayed to our Lord about it.

There was a very nice village in Canada named La Prairie. Everyone who lived there was a Christian Indian. The Jesuits started it for Christian Indians, and lived there themselves to help them. Father de Lamberville thought, "How I should like to send Kateri to La Prairie because she could learn more about pleasing God there and she could become a saint." He asked her if she would like to go.

"O, yes, yes," she said, "I should like to go very much indeed."

She asked her uncle's permission but he was dreadfully angry at the bare idea and scolded her for thinking of it. He wanted to keep her to do the work. She could go hunting for him now. Then he wanted to keep her from God. But he must not do that . . . God comes first! Kateri prayed, and thought about it for a long time. Then she decided that she ought to go to this nice place.

How could she find the way? Father de Lamberville sent her a fine Christian Indian. His name was Hot Ashes. Hot Ashes knew

the way very well and he promised to take her. Another Indian was going, too.

They all waited until Uncle went off hunting, then they started. It was very early in the morning. No one was up. They slipped out of the house before it was light; they did not speak, but they ran down the trail under the dark trees, with footsteps as light as thistle-down. A beaver made a slap, slap on the water with his tail. A sleepy squirrel chuckled. Kateri took a little wooden cross with her, clasped tightly to her breast under her blanket.

They ran fast—fast—and never looked behind.

First, went Hot Ashes. Kateri followed at a little distance, and the other Indian was the rear-guard. Holy angels were flying above them.

But, Oh, dear! Uncle came back too soon. He came back and asked for Kateri.



“He really meant to kill her . . .”



She had run away! He was simply furious. . . he took down his sharpest tomahawk, and without waiting a moment he rushed down the trail after them yelling, "I kill! I kill!"

Kateri and her two Indians were a long way ahead, but Uncle could run faster. He was catching up. The Indian at the back put his ear to the ground. . . . Yes, he could hear the dull thump of feet. Uncle was coming and was gaining on them. This is what he did. He stopped. He took his gun and shot at a bird which he pretended to see on top of a tree.

BANG . . . BANG . . . went the gun.

JUMP . . . went Kateri . . . into the woods and then into a hollow tree to hide.

Silence . . . sh . . . sh . . . sh. . . .

Uncle came crashing through the bushes. His feathers were all ruffled up; some of them caught in a tree and some were flying up into the air. . . . Such a sight!

He saw the Indian looking in the grass for the dead bird. Of course he did not know that this Indian was with Kateri, he thought he was a strange Indian.

"Have you seen a girl running away?" he shrieked. The Indian slowly turned, looked at him for a long time without blinking, and then pointed, without a word, down the trail.

Uncle bounded on. He passed right by Kateri in the tree without knowing it. He





“He passed right by Kateri in the tree without knowing it . . . ”

ran on . . . and on . . . and on . . . he couldn't find her. Then he gave up and went home.

### The Rest of the Journey

**N**ow Kateri and her Indians could go on. She came out from her hiding-place and they took the trail once again until they came

to a river, strong and deep. This was the majestic Hudson River. The river showed them the way for a long distance. They had only to follow its course. But presently they arrived at an exquisite lake. The sun was rising over the smooth water and the banks were red with the bright colors which autumn brings. Behind, there were purple mountains. It was so lovely that it seemed like a bit of heaven let down to the earth. Its name is Lake George now, but then it was the *Sainte Sacrament*, meaning the Lake of the Blessed Sacrament, and that is a perfect name for it, for there is nothing more beautiful in heaven or earth than God's Holy Sacrament.

Hot Ashes had left his canoe there for them, so when they found it in the bushes they launched and paddled across to the other side. They made a fire by striking stones together, in the way that Indians do, and then they caught fish to roast. They found wild grapes, pumpkins and nuts. So they had a fine breakfast.

There was a lot more walking. Poor Kateri's feet were all scratched and bleeding and she was so tired, but she remembered her white cross and the red berries and she said, "I will give my bleeding feet to love Jesus." Her eyes hurt her, too, very much. They

hurt so badly that she pulled the blanket over them and made a chapel for them to suffer in, silently.

### La Prairie

**A**T LAST, at last they came to the great river St. Lawrence. They followed a trail which led into the woods again and soon arrived at a place where the trees had been cut down. There was a high fence made of little logs and a secret door. They opened the door and there was the village . . . there was La Prairie! O, how nice it looked! They were so tired.

The people ran out to meet them calling, "Sago, Ka-loo-loo-moo-ke!" and holding their hands. Father Frémen, the head Father, came, too. They brought him some mail but he would not open one letter until his guests were seated at a fine hot dinner. An Indian lady named Anastasia took Kateri to her own house. She bathed her poor feet and put her into a soft warm bed where she dropped to sleep in a moment, and slept nearly all of the next day.

\* \* \*

The new place looked very much like the old one only it was clean and the houses had doors and door-steps. The people were different, for they were all taught to be good, so

they did not fight nor steal nor hurt each other. They went to Mass every day and were learning to pray. There was a beautiful little church and such nice Fathers! Kateri loved it all; but she did have to cry a little in bed, sometimes, when no one was looking, for she remembered her home and her dear friends, so far away, and without the happy things she had now. But she learned that God loved them, too, and was taking care of them.

### The End of Her Life

**K**ATERI grew up. She was not a little girl any longer now. She had her First Communion at La Prairie. The church was beautiful, but it was not dressed up this time as it was at her baptism. For now she was to think only of God's great Gift, and not of the pretty things about her. She wanted to think of nothing else except that our Lord was there, His own very Self in her soul. She wanted to keep Him always, too. Now she stayed in the chapel more and more. The priest used to find her there in the early morning, for she went, even in the bitter cold, at four o'clock. She thought more and more, too, of the sufferings of our Lord and she tried to make herself feel hardness for His sake. She even put sharp briars in her bed to sleep on.

Our Lord left her at La Prairie for three years, and then He called her to Heaven. Her life is very wonderful. Just think! from a little savage papoose our Lord made her a lovely child of His own. He kept her pure and holy as a white cross on which He could reign. And He received her for a little suffering saint to give Him gladly red berries of love to blend with His own great Garland of Love.

### In Heaven

**K**ATERI lives in Heaven now. She helps our Lord to work miracles for those who need them. There was a little boy named Rocco who was blind and sick. His mother prayed to Kateri and she caused him to see again and to be made quite well. Then she brought sight to a little girl, three years old, who grew up to be a fine teacher, and lived many years. She helps priests, and grown-up people, and every one who asks her. We can wear her relic and can ask her to pray for us. Some day you may be able to visit her beautiful shrine at Auriesville. She has another shrine at Caughnawauga, where she once lived, too. There are two thousand Indians there who might have been savages, if Holy Church had not made them good and pleasing to our Lord. She was laid in her grave there, a little saint among her own people.



