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by Florence Wedge

*Life of the Indian Servant of God*  
*Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha*

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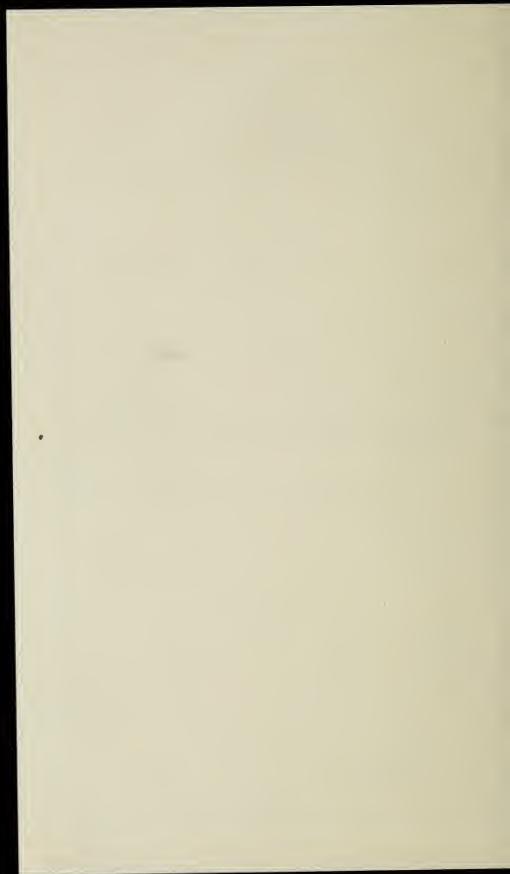
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*Life of the Indian Servant of God  
Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha*

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FRANCISCAN PUBLISHERS  
Pulaski, Wisconsin  
1958

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## O N E

### THE SECRETS GOD WOULD NOT TELL

Although we human beings are made in God's image, we are not exactly Godlike all along the line. In a million ways the Creator differs from His creatures. Take, as one small example among the million, the matter of keeping a secret.

There is a saying current among the human species that three may keep a secret if two of them are dead. Hardly an exaggeration, however hard it may hit our pride. Most of us have heard secrets, at one time or another, which we found too good and consequently too hard to keep behind closed lips. So we followed our natural inclination and gave them a chance to go places.

That goes to show that we children of the Almighty haven't taken after our Father. Might as well be candid

about it: we like to run our private broadcasting stations. We've reached a point where the world's population may be neatly classified into two categories: the gossipers and the gossipees. We have yet to learn from our Father how to keep a secret with the proper spirit of secretiveness.

Two secrets which God would not tell to St. Isaac Jogues may be told at the beginning of this thumbnail sketch of Kateri Tekakwitha.

The first has to do with the Mohawk hothead who murdered the French missionary. Jogues the Jesuit knew, of course, that the blood of martyrs is the seed of new Christians. All missionaries give that truth a certain amount of thought. They have to remember that unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But when it lets itself be buried into the furrow, then it becomes pregnant with new life and produces fruits worthy of God.

When Father Jogues was tomahawked to death — when the grain of wheat was cast into the blood-soaked clay at Ossernenon, now Auriesville, New York — God didn't say a word. The Sower went forth to sow His seed in silence.

Twelve months later, the seed bore fruit. The Mohawk hothead found spiritual birth in the bodily death of God's apostle. The convert took the name of the Frenchman he had murdered and walked away from the baptismal font to pay his debt to society.

The ashes of the second Isaac were tossed into the

St. Lawrence River and God marked the place. Even as we, burying our boys, remember where.

There was yet another secret which the Most High did not tell Father Jogues in his last hour. When a tomahawk snuffed out the life of that hero on the holy hill of Ossernenon, it did not snuff everything out. The grain of wheat did not die forever. Ten years after the martyrdom of Jogues, a little Indian papoose was born on that holy hill.

Just a little Mohawk babe, like hundreds of her tribe. Anyone around there would have predicted a very ordinary future for her. But God, Who kept His predictions to Himself, knew what she would become.

He knew that this Mohawk child was destined to walk, on moccasined feet, the high road to Christian holiness.

And she's done it, dear girl. In the annals of the Catholic Church she is already listed with the Venerables. If all goes well with her Cause at Rome, she may be inscribed among the Saints sooner than we think.

Kateri Tekakwitha — she's the little Indian papoose I've been wanting to tell you about in the following chapters.

T W O

## FRESH FROM THE HANDS OF GOD

The Mohawk boy who grew up to become War Chief Kenhoronkwa didn't care too much about Iroquois girls. He had the chance to choose his bride from any one of the Five Iroquois Nations — Mohawks, Oneidas, Cayugas, Onondagas, or Senecas. Plenty of matrimonial prospects, or so it seemed. But he shrugged his shoulders, turned the chance down, and remained a bachelor.

That is, until he met and married a sweet little Algonquin lass named Kahenta.

Iroquois women, from what he had seen with his own eyes, were too fond of bossing their husbands. Now Kenhoronkwa wasn't precisely the type who might glory in being driven about by the tip of his nose. He wanted his squaw to face the fact that orders around the lodge or long house were to emanate from him.

The squaw was very gracious about it. Like most young women of Algonquin stock, Kahenta had been brought up to be more docile and submissive than anything else. Besides, breathed there the Algonquin wife who would refuse to cherish and obey the Mohawk who had rescued her from a captive's fate by making her his bride?

Kenhoronkwa, bless him, had done just that for Kahenta. She could never forget it.

The scraps of information we have about this Algonquin girl make it clear that her young years were years of misery and misfortune. The only happy day she could recall was that on which a Jesuit Father at Three Rivers had baptized her into the Christian Faith.

But Three Rivers was only a memory, only fuel for the fire of her interior anguish.

Like so many others of her defeated tribe, Kahenta had been compelled to make the dangerous journey along the war trail from Three Rivers to Ossernenon on the south bank of the Mohawk. Ossernenon was anything but a friendly place. Here Jogues had been martyred; and here Rene Goupil and John de la Lande had likewise fallen under the hatchet blows of enemy Mohawks. The future looked far from rosy for the exile from Canada.

Still, one had to keep up one's courage. While there was life there was also hope. God was as much at Ossernenon as He was at Three Rivers. It seemed too wonderful to be true, but the Jesuit Blackrobe had brushed away all possible doubts: God was everywhere. He understood the hurt in one's heart. His Son had been a Displaced Person too, in the days of the wrath of King Herod.



And God was still good. He still let young parents share with Him the joy of creating new immortal beings destined to see His Face in heaven.

Some such comforting thoughts must have flitted about in Kahenta's mind the morning she pressed her little papoose, her firstborn, to her breast. It was in the year of Our Lord 1656. Almighty God, Kenhoronkwa, and Kahenta had helped tiny Tekakwitha make her debut in the Mohawk village.

Some years previously, Father John de Brebeuf had composed a Christmas carol in the land of the Hurons. Its words came back to Kahenta, begging to be sung. On a day like that, the joy in a mother's heart had to find release. So the Indian infant was introduced to Jesus her King in her first lullaby:

“Within a lodge of broken bark  
The tender Babe was found;  
A ragged robe of rabbit skin  
Enwrapped His beauty round.  
And as the hunter braves drew nigh  
The angels' song rang loud and high:  
Jesus, your King, is born; Jesus is born.  
In excelsis gloria.”

Here at Ossernenon was another lodge of broken bark. Another ragged robe of rabbit skin. And in the arms of frail and fatigued Kahenta, as in Our Lady's, a gift from heaven. No wonder Kahenta wanted to sing. In Mary's life, too, there had been the sublime moment that only a *Magnificat* could fill.



Much as she would have liked her offspring to enjoy the benefits of Christianity, Kahenta did not take it upon herself to administer the Sacrament of Baptism. One reason may be that the priests she knew had not instructed her to baptize any future children she might bring into the world. Another reason may be that she did not remember the sacramental rite well enough to venture into it. Furthermore, Kahenta knew from her own experience how difficult it might be to persevere as a lone Christian among the heathen. Possibly she could not bring herself to assume the risk of launching her child into a religion whose observance would be next to impossible under the circumstances. Be that as it may, the baby was not baptized.

It seemed most unlikely that she would ever be. Her father did not look with gentle eye upon the missionaries from Europe. Had his wife suggested baptizing the new arrival, he might have balked and kicked up such a fuss as to terrify her into silence for the rest of her days.

Kahenta, however, knew all the potency of prayer to the God her husband thought of as a nobody. When the sleeping baby needed no more lullabies, the young mother made up her own prayers to Rawenniio, the God of the white man:

“Great Spirit, breathe upon my little one that the poison may not touch her. Rawenniio, God of the Black-robos and the French! You send the sunshine and the rain. You teach the birds to fly and make the corn grow for the red man too. Give wings to the soul of my Mohawk papoose and plant a lily in her heart.”

The God of white and red and all other men remembered that prayer. He gave wings to the soul of Kahenta's daughter and planted a lily in her heart.

In the hour it pleased Him, the lily burst in bloom.

## T H R E E

### ORPHANED AND GROWING UP

Dark and threatening clouds streaked the Mohawk skies along about the time of Tekakwitha's fourth birthday.

Mohawks half-crazed with terror offered human victims of propitiation to their deity of evil and their demon of war. And still the mortality rate ran high as the plague of smallpox spread at a staggering pace. Medicine men and sorcerers worked as hard to keep the living on their feet as others worked to hack shallow graves for the numerous dead.

One morning the Mohawks streamed with mournful death song into the long house of their leader. War Chief Kenhoronkwa lay lifeless upon a beaver skin, dressed in deer hides and new moccasins for the journey into the Great Unknown.

In an adjoining room his wife Kahenta and their two children, Tekakwitha and the baby boy Otsikehta, were at the last gasp. A good Christian friend of the family, Anastasia, whom the dread disease had apparently forgotten, gathered the farewell words of the Chief's Algonquin wife:

"Anastasia, the little ones are dying. Without the blessed water! I am praying, praying. Breath is leaving me; but the heart will pray until it stops."

The dear heart stopped beating and praying that day. A few hours later the boy Otsikehta closed his little eyes that had seen scarcely anything of life. Tekakwitha remained the sole survivor of a once happy family.

The earth did not seem to have a stronger hold on her feet. Anastasia, ever faithful and watchful, marvelled that the mite had not already let go of her feeble grip on life. The thoughts of the good woman shuttled back and forth between two fears, both equally poignant: the fear that Tekakwitha might die, and the fear that Tekakwitha might come back from death's door.

The alert Anastasia had seen enough at Ossernenon and its environs to suspect what the future might hold in store for a parentless child. She was not unaware of the drunken orgies and scandalously loose living that now desecrated a site once sanctified by the holocaust of heroic Christian martyrs. She took alarm at the thought that the orphan lass might grow into adolescence only to be forced to share in the butchering of enemies and in partaking of their roasted flesh, after the manner of so many Mohawk women and girls.

But Tekakwitha, fortunately, knew nothing about this. She got well again.

One month later, she had not only not lost her weak hold on life, but had strengthened it beyond all expectations. The smallpox had left scars — they stayed with her for life — on her clear skin, and her eyesight was impaired considerably. Too, she had been so long abed that she now had to learn from Anastasia, that tower of patience, how to walk sure-footed on the floorboards of the long house.

For all her physical handicaps, Tekakwitha was her dear little lovable self again. She did not miss her lost ones too much. At the tender age of four, one is easily consoled and made to forget hurts. In her uncle Iowerano and his wife Karitha she found a new set of parents who treated her kindly. Iowerano, her father's brother, had been elected chief upon Kenhoronkwa's unexpected death.

A strange man, Iowerano. He had a heart of gold for the four-year-old niece under his roof. But his jaws could tense with sudden fury and there was something fierce about him when his temper flared. Tekakwitha had nothing to fear from him, however, for she had become his adopted daughter and she meant much to him.

A toddler couldn't be of much help around the lodge, as the chief well knew. But he knew also that toddlers have a way of growing up all of a sudden. And in the normal course of events any Mohawk girl could be trusted to fall in love with a handsome Mohawk brave.

Iowerano was not so busy governing his tribe but

that he found time for matchmaking schemes. It never once entered his mind that the girl in question might turn down any proposal. Custom had it that a Mohawk man upon his marriage came to live in the home of his bride. So, let Iowerano wait a few more summers, and a strapping, sinewy youth would undoubtedly enter into his household.

As the years wore on, plans for the forthcoming alliance began to shape up. At the age of eight, Tekakwitha was formally betrothed to a boy about a year older. Indian youngsters were sometimes promised to each other as early as their cradle days, in view of some future time when boy and girl would be of age to tie the nuptial knot. So Tekakwitha was practically engaged to be married. Although still a good bit too young for real love and marriage, she knew that sooner or later she must make up her mind.

Her uncle and two aunts talked about her coming marriage as if it were the only thing of importance under the sun. As the daughter of a chieftain, Tekakwitha was expected to marry an outstanding hunter, a powerful warrior, an Indian youth whose presence in a lodge would bring honor and prestige to everyone there.

There was simply no way of telling how the little girl would turn out. She seemed to be so ordinary, so average, so shy and retiring. She was not even baptized. There did not seem to be great likelihood that her non-Christian guardians would consent to her embracing Christianity. And, anyway, she knew absolutely nothing about the true God. She had never seen a Blackrobe in her life.



Karitha and Arosen, her aunts, had seen Blackrobes, but their interest had not even been aroused. They were dyed-in-the-wool heathens. Often enough, they liked to show off their niece and dressed her in the richest finery they could afford. But outside of that, they made her utilize her every waking hour in work around the homestead.

On rare occasions Tekakwitha enjoyed a brief respite from toil when Chief Iowerano invited her to accompany him on a fishing trip in his birchbark canoe. But all too soon the fun was over and back to work the little Indian miss went.

The aunts seemed to consider it below their dignity or something like that to gather firewood, so the task devolved upon her. With a smile the dear child buckled on her snowshoes, tied her red shawl, and fastened the burden strap around her pockmarked forehead. Then she slipped out into the storm to face the whiplash of the wind. When she returned with her bundle of fagots, her aunts had to coax warmth and circulation back into her frostbitten fingers.

"The North Wind," Tekakwitha explained in her merry way, "the North Wind slapped me in the face, then bound me fast to a hickory tree after making me stumble against it."

At the time when girls still play with dolls, Tekakwitha found herself saddled with plenty of chores. She was busy learning the many household arts a Mohawk woman must know. Already she had acquired rare skill in sewing

moccasins and in making wampum decorations. Her deft fingers were expert at every cut of the blade and every stitch of the leather thonging. She chopped kindling for the home fires and lent a hand with the seeding and harvesting in the fields. Apparently she worried about nothing; and the only ones who worried about her were her marriage-bent relatives in the long house she called home.

October 1666. It had been a good season for crops and the Mohawks were hoping for a plentiful harvest. They were in their best fighting trim but, understandably, not too eager to engage in combat since they were reduced to approximately three hundred — no match for vast armies.

And then, suddenly, French voices were heard yipping and yelling in the distance. It was the Marquis de Tracy with twelve hundred men.

Round-eyed with alarm, the Mohawks assembled a few likely victims and slew them to pacify their god of war.

But the divinity thus invoked did not stop the French advance. In shock and appalled surprise the unnerved Indians realized that to take up arms would be only to court disaster and devastation. Their courage at its lowest ebb, they all sought safety in flight. Men, women, and children bolted, leaving the French in mastery of the place.

De Tracy did not massacre a single brawny brave. He did not fire a single shot. His purpose seemed merely to have been to scare the savages and ruin their three villages — a destruction which the French said the Indians



had coming to them because they had killed Jogues and other French Blackrobes.

Father de Raffeix, one who hadn't got killed, had reluctantly agreed to accompany the twelve hundred warriors. After setting up a wooden cross in the village square, he intoned the *Te Deum*, and everyone who had a voice joined in. The Mohawk Valley had never heard anything like it since the beginning of creation. Gazing at the flaming palisades of the defeated tribe, the departing priest murmured with a sob in his voice, "Poor children, the Blackrobes will make it up to you."

When the conquered families returned to their homes, they saw the strange wooden object in the square. Anastasia recognized it as the long absent sign of the Christian Faith she loved. There was a wet glory in her eyes as she looked upon the symbol of man's redemption. Tekakwitha saw the wooden thing, too, but to her it remained meaningless. She failed to see the thoughtful gleam in the Christian woman's eyes. The future lover of the cross of Christ had not yet been told of its beauty and sublimity.

While the little girl looked at the cross, the grown-up people exchanged opinions, sighs, and suggestions. The thought of food and survival through the long winter months at hand obsessed all minds. They had neither corn nor squash, the staple foods of the Mohawk community.

Like many others, Tekakwitha went out under the grey sky that winter, scooping snow away down to the roots of bushes and plants, then cooking the roots and eating them. Weak and half-starved, the people of the de-

vastated Mohawk colony somehow pulled through the winter with its killing cold and faced the springtime with renewed courage.

They were now eager for permanent peace and sent their deputies to Quebec to talk about the possibility of burying the hatchet. Before the year 1667 was over, all Five Nations were at peace with the French.

Tekakwitha didn't know it, but she was about to meet the Blackrobes for the first time in her eleven years.

## FOUR

### TEKAKWITHA MEETS THE JESUITS

The tribal chief was not especially eager to let the Blackrobes set foot in his territory. But there was little he could do to stop them.

Anger gnawed at him as he thought things over. Those Frenchmen, they had their way of imposing conditions. The peace they had made had a condition attached to it: that the Mohawks would permit French missionaries to dwell among them.

Lowerano pasted a company smile on his face. He swallowed his exasperation and politely spoke his piece. "Stay with us, O Blackrobes. Sleep in our cabins and let our women feed you with their cooking. Bring to us the wisdom of the Frenchman. Teach us of Rawenniio, the lord and master of your world."

Father Bruyas, the Jesuit Superior, bowed courteously as he rose to his feet. "Mighty chief of the Mohawks, we have come, not to teach you the wisdom of the French or that of any mortal; but the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and of Life Eternal."

Holy Spirit. Life Eternal. Iowerano didn't have the slightest inkling of what the Blackrobe might mean. There was a thick silence while the peace pipe went its rounds from man to man in the council group. Meanwhile Father Superior unfastened the crucifix from his belt and held it high in front of all the people who had gathered in curious clusters. In a few eloquent words he told them the beautiful story of God's love for men of every clime and color.

Clad in her deerskin tunic, short skirt, leggings and moccasins, Tekakwitha was listening intently. Her eyes wandered from the Superior to the other two Jesuits. Later, she learned their names. Father Fremin and Father Pierron. But at the moment she understood only that they were good men, their hearts filled with love and compassion for the poor Mohawks; for her, poor little orphan girl. Their names, after all, didn't matter much. The important thing was that they had come to reveal a new way of life.

They had come, as Father Bruyas said, to bring to the warring Mohawks "the peace that the world cannot give."

It was late July of 1667, and the Indian lass had seen God's missionaries for the first time. They had accompanied the Indian delegation returning from Quebec.

When the council fires had died down and the peace

pipe had been put away, Chief Iowerano according to the rules of the etiquette game had to invite the three missionaries into his cabin. He had previously boomed out his orders to Tekakwitha. She must present the bowl of sagamite of the foreigners. She must show them to their mats. She must keep on her toes, ready to scurry off in any direction.

The small mistress of ceremonies obeyed to the letter. She did things beautifully. So beautifully that when she offered a bark bowl of water to Father Fremin — that bowl she had made all by herself — he smiled and said, "God bless you, my child." She had a sunny smile for him in return, the kind of soulful smile that made the priest forget the pockmarks on her cheeks.

That night the three Jesuits slept on mats in the birchbark cabin. Not even the slightest shred of privacy was possible. Braves were snoring around them, gnats were walking over their black cassocks, and mosquitoes were humming all about the place. The foul odors in the cabin sickened the priests and the ill-digested food turned their stomach. But for God and souls they were willing to put up with anything. They were the Loyola brand of heroes, and this was a time to be heroic.

Tekakwitha had heard a little here and there about the Blackrobes, but had never dreamt they could be so kind and fatherly. All day long they visited the sick and had happy, noisy children tagging along behind them wherever they went. Instinctively she believed every word they said about the true God. Her heart swelled with

hope and joy at the thought that since God loved everyone, He must surely love her too.

Yes, Tekakwitha, with an everlasting love.

One afternoon, when the three of them were out reciting their Breviaries, they came upon the Indian girl drawing water for their next meal.

"See that little Tekakwitha," said Father Fremin, looking up from his book. "How she can carry that heavy jug. That child never rests."

Father Pierron smiled good-naturedly. She had simplicity and a suavity about her that made a deep impression upon him. "Who could have been her teacher? She has the manners of a well brought up French girl."

Father Fremin did not answer right away. It struck him, just like that, how God will sometimes scatter His surprises in the most unexpected nooks. He put his thought into simple words: "God plants His flowers in strange, wild places." Little did he suspect that the girl of whom he was thus speaking was destined to be known in the years to come as the Lily of the Mohawks!

That same evening Tekakwitha was present at a baptism. It seems that a scalp-hunting party of Mohicans had rushed into the village and just as quickly rushed out after brutally attacking a Mohawk woman. Father Fremin knelt beside the victim, pleading with her to accept God's gift of salvation. At last the dying one made a gesture of acceptance and the Blackrobe hastened to baptize her in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.



In a few moments the soul so recently purified passed on to God.

Tekakwitha probably did not know that other Mohawk women, during those three days, had also asked to be baptized. One of them, holding her baby boy in her arms, had implored the priest to baptize him: "At least baptize my son. He is young. He has not my sins."

On her knees near the squaw who had just breathed her last, the Indian child felt a sudden yearning to ask the same precious gift of regeneration. But when she raised her earnest little face a bit, she saw among the crowd her uncle Iowerano. The eyes which he rolled at her were the kind to make a child tremble. His lips were set in one grim line. She could cherish no false illusions that he might nod his approval. She knew him well enough to avoid asking any permission at a time like that. It wouldn't help to bring his thin patience to the breaking point.

That same week the Jesuits left Iowerano's cabin and took up other posts of duty among the more important Iroquois villages. Father Pierron remained close enough to be able to visit Kanawake now and then. (Kanawake was the village to which Iowerano and his people had moved following the smallpox epidemic.) Here Tekakwitha saw the missionary occasionally, but never once did she ask for baptism. It may be presumed that she feared the steely eyes and sharp tongue of her uncle.

As she entered into her teens, there came over her an overpowering distaste for the clamor of festive reveling. The dances and feasts of her tribesfolk left a pit

of emptiness in her young heart. A shudder passed over her at the thought that she might have to spend all her life in such a milieu. It was all pretty ugly with hints of uglier things to come.

The idea of marriage left her cold. Somehow or other she had a conviction that marriage was not for her. She had surely never heard of the beauty of Christian virginity embraced for the love of God; yet deep down she had a feeling that no mortal man would ever win her heart's love.

While other girls were trying their best to get a little romance going, this girl who was different sought only silence and solitude. Somewhere in the deep woods she had carefully cut a cross into the bark of a tree. Though she didn't know any formal prayers, when she knelt before that symbol of God's love her heart was never at a loss for words.



## F I V E

### THE UPHILL ROAD TO BAPTISM

When Tekakwitha was fourteen, the great Iroquois festival known as the Feast of the Dead took place. Her own father and mother, along with all who had died in the previous ten years, were disinterred, feasted, and buried in a common plot.

The whole idea revolted Tekakwitha while it brought the swift salt tears to her eyes. Why all this nonsense about clothing the dead in furs and robes and carrying them pickaback for a banquet in the cabins they had once occupied? She felt immensely relieved when the huge burial pit was covered over and all was finished.

All right if the women wanted to place hampers of food upon the common grave. All right if they believed that the soul of a deceased person hovered near the body

until the next Feast of the Dead. Let them think and do as they pleased. Already in her heart of hearts she believed far more consoling things about bodies that had once housed immortal souls.

The Feast of the Dead left scars. It reopened old wounds. God healed them when He came to dwell at Kanawake.

Shortly after the famous feast, a bark chapel was standing proudly on its foundations and a good Jesuit was in residence to shepherd the small flock.

Then it was Christmas and Father Boniface gave the chapel the Bethlehem touch. He had everybody there — Mary, Joseph, the Baby, the shepherds. The Christmas crib was the admiration of Christians and heathens alike. While the Christians crowded into St. Peter's Chapel, the non-Christians at the windows and doors craned their necks to see the Infant in His crib, with fir and hemlock boughs around Him and candles in front of Him.

Most probably Tekakwitha took many long, lonesome peeks. With the wind whipping at her cheeks and penetrating her to the bones, she must have stood in the snow near the house of prayer, thinking out her first Christmas meditation.

As the days and weeks pushed one another on, her aunts refreshed her memory of matrimony often enough. But when the occasion came, their niece refused the proffered hand of Two Feathers.

She turned Green Turtle down.

She laughed at Tiger Eye's eager proposal.

She said "No" to White Lightning and "No" to Silver Arrow.

This was the last straw. More than her uncle could tolerate. He paced the floor like a caged lion and waved his long arms in despair. "And who do you think you are, Tekakwitha? If it were not for me, Silver Arrow would not even look at a girl like you. And you have insulted him. Do you understand what a terrible thing you have done? And what is more, you are insulting your forebears, your traditions, the customs of our tribe. Every Indian girl must marry when the time comes or she is a disgrace to herself and to her people."

The accused calmly held her ground, firm like the Rockies out west. "I do not mean to offend you or anyone, my father. I shall continue to serve you gladly and faithfully. But I do not wish to marry. Please leave me this freedom."

After months and months of futile coaxing and threatening, Lowerano's bitterness simmered down. Some simmering also took place in the minds of her aunts. They all turned kind, the three who had authority over her. The girl with a mind of her own was given the freedom she coveted. There was no more talk of suitors for the time being.

When Father Boniface's health failed him, a younger Jesuit was sent to Kanawake in his place. The newcomer, Father James de Lamberville, wasn't a day over thirty-four.

Uninitiated stranger that he was, Father de Lamber-

ville didn't know he might lose his scalp if he set foot inside Chief Iowerano's long house without a previous invitation. So he set foot inside, one day when he happened by. But he kept his scalp intact. There was only Tekakwitha in the house at the time, and everyone under God's kindly stars knows that she was no scalp-hunter.

To tell the truth, she ought to have been out hoeing in the fields, like everybody else. But the previous day she had cut her foot with the hoe and was now stuck with a sore foot all done up in bandages.

How she must have blessed that accident! It was a moment of supreme joy when she could see the priest alone, at long last. All the desires and longings of her God-loving heart gushed out. And God let His priest see deep into her beautiful soul. Father de Lamberville realized that he had found a treasure in the Mohawk wilderness, and he thanked heaven for this pearl of great price. At his suggestion, however, she consented to wait a while longer for baptism. Better go easy and not stir her uncle's indignation, since Iowerano was a man of easily inflammable temper.

As soon as her foot was better, Tekakwitha began to show up regularly at St. Peter's Chapel for morning and night prayers. Her relatives were soon aware of the goings-on, but to her utter amazement they let her do as she pleased. It could be that she had disappointed them so thoroughly by refusing to marry that now they didn't care much what became of her. At any rate, she was allowed to rehearse in peace for her Christian years to come.

She spent all that winter preparing for her baptism, which was scheduled to take place on Easter Sunday of 1676.

Would her uncle permit her to be baptized? Well, yes, he did grunt his approbation. And the two aunts yielded with fairly good grace.

The winter snows melted. The flowers appeared in the land of the Mohawks. On Easter morning, April 18, the radiant daughter of Kenhoronkwa and Kahenta walked in the brilliant sunshine to St. Peter's Chapel. She knew that she was to be given as spiritual patroness the great Christian virgin and martyr, St. Catherine of Alexandria.

"Kateri, what do you ask of the Church of God?"

As if Father de Lamberville did not know! But there had to be an official answer. It came, vibrant, from the inmost soul of the candidate. "Faith!"

"To what does Faith lead?"

"To life everlasting." The words were filled with triumphant rapture.

It was brief, beautiful, sublime. Tekakwitha in her richest robes became Kateri. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost came and made Themselves at home in her soul.

It was already a good start for sainthood.

## S I X

### FROM KANAWAKE TO THE PRAYING CASTLE

When Tekakwitha became Kateri by the grace of God, she didn't put a pietistic blindfold on. She kept her head level and her eyes open. She faced the fact that God coming into her life had brought His cross along with Him. She knew that she would have much to suffer.

In her uncommon delicacy of soul, she was already firmly resolved to serve God to the best of her ability by cooperation with everyone of His graces. She was not the kind to take her religious responsibilities lightly. Her new faith was going to be a seven-days-a-week affair, not a cloak for Sunday forenoons.

In the early days of her conversion to Christianity, the Mohawks worshipped the ground she walked on. For Kateri it was something in the nature of a spiritual honey-



moon. Like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, she felt it "was good to be there." Day after day she made her happy way to St. Peter's Chapel to tell God how wonderful He was and to thank Him for the grace of her baptism.

Love came into her life and transfigured it—the love of Christ and of His holy Mother. The Indian maid who had been so modest and unassuming found it easy enough to lead a life of blameless purity. Her natural feeling of inferiority, which had been with her all along the years, had prepared her for the practice of Christian humility. The empty places in her heart were being filled up and the beauty of her soul was daily making her a pleasing spectacle to God and His angels.

And then, like Christ and Peter, Kateri came down from her Thabor. Life changed completely for her, and she found herself with a lot to put up with and a lot to offer to God. Almost overnight her admirers turned into severe critics. Her comings and goings were marked by nudges and evil whispers. Children threw stones at her. Vicious comments got into circulation. Indians who couldn't stay sober half a day assaulted her on her way to church. It soon became clear that the new Christian would have to work out her salvation — and her sanctification, since that was what she wanted — amid a chaos of violent opposition.

Rumors went their rounds and were embroidered as they spread. She was accused of crimes for which she'd rather have the ground open and swallow her than com-

mit in the sight of God. Sorcerers scorned her; drunkards tossed their foulest epithets at her; slanderers distorted facts about her to suit their own evil ends; injustices and rebuffs were constantly rained down upon her.

God sometimes permits His friends to be treated that way. Especially when they love Him very much. We know how His only-begotten Son loved Him — and how He ended up on a cross, His arms and feet spiked to it. It is God's standard procedure. Although from where we stand, we have a feeling that consolations and pats on the back are His best gifts, from where He stands He sees that too much of that could turn us into spiritual softies. So He loves us enough to send us a dull, drab, glamorless cross, all the harder to take and bear because most of the time we are the only ones aware of it. Crosses are always so much more comfortable on the shoulder when "the whole town" knows they're there.

So Kateri had her cross. Naturally she suffered keenly. But through it all she made no sour complaint and sought no consolation other than that which the good Lord sent her. She needed superhuman strength to bear up under this, and strength came from heaven to sustain her. Without trying in any way to glorify or excuse herself, she went her humble way as before. Resignation entered her soul and made itself a sanctuary there.

She was alone in the cabin one day when a Mohawk made an ugly scene in her presence. His fury at white heat, he made a gesture as if preparing to send his toma-



hawk crashing into her skull. Her crime? He snarled it out at her: "Cease to be a Christian or die!"

Kateri drew herself up to her full height and for one timeless moment the girl with God in her soul looked at the man with the tomahawk in his fist. It was too much for the intruder. He turned on his heels and tore out of the cabin.

A still greater trial awaited Kateri. Her aunt Karitha, seething with displeasure, let it poison her thoughts to the extent that she turned accuser. She decided to smear her niece's good name. Frankly, there was nothing with which she could reproach Kateri. But with ill will, a nothing can ordinarily be dressed up to look like something.

A word inadvertently spoken by Kateri unleashed the older woman's flood of calumny. Kateri, we are told, once thoughtlessly called her uncle by his first name instead of "Father" as Indian girls usually named their father's brothers.

By any stretch of the imagination there was no sin in that. But a vengeful soul could spin a web of sin around it — and did. Karitha accused her niece of an unlawful affection for Iowerano and flashed the news around that Kateri had had immoral dealings with the chief.

For Kateri, that angel of purity, it was the worst possible form of calumny. Her innocence, she well knew, was beyond all question. But so many didn't know the facts. So many were more inclined to believe the bad about a girl than the good.

At the first opportunity, Aunt Karitha stammered the trumped-up tale into the ears of Father de Lamber-ville. "So Kateri, whom you esteem so virtuous, is notwithstanding a hypocrite who is deceiving you."

The good Jesuit didn't swallow that without examining it properly. He saw through the colossal piece of falsehood. Strongly he protested that he was sure Kateri had not veered off course and was still the angelic soul whose purity had touched him so deeply in the past. That was enough to scotch the talebearer; she departed in haste and embarrassment.

Father's ready tongue had given Karitha an answer like lightning. But back alone in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in St. Peter's, the good pastor of souls got to thinking seriously about the matter. Sure, Kateri was one wonderful girl. She had received exceptional graces and was keeping her ideals and actions on the supernatural plane. In a place where some converts quickly forgot their baptismal promises and didn't care much how they stood before God, Kateri was like a light shining in the darkness. Even in the days preceding her acceptance of Christianity, she had avoided pagan fetes and entertainments. And he knew how humbly and thoroughly she carried out his counsels with regard to her progress in the spiritual sphere.

And yet! This girl with great possibilities of virtue was human. She had human instincts, human desires, human passions. She could fall from grace. Souls more advanced in virtue had been catapulted from almost-

heaven to the lowest depths. It could happen to anyone, even to Kateri. Maybe he better look into this.

When the Christian community had said the rosary that evening, Father took Kateri aside for a few words. Words about hell, about sin, about the sacred ground which the unmarried may not trespass. Then he touched upon the delicate matter of her aunt's denunciation.

Kateri's reply made the priest understand what a loved masterpiece of divine skill and affection stood before him. "No, Father, I have never committed this sin, not on the occasion when my aunt accused me, nor at any other time. I am not afraid of going to hell for this; but I am afraid of not being brave enough to let them kill me rather than to work in the fields on Sunday."

A refrain began drumming in Father de Lamberville's brain: **I must get Kateri out of here.**

Kindly he told her that she would be much better off elsewhere, since in Kanawake only a bleak future lay ahead for her. Her virtue, not to mention her very life, was in danger. It would be prudence, not base cowardice, to seek a safer place. Then he told her about the Iroquois reservation at Caughnawaga, a few miles west of Montreal. Now there was a spot where a girl could love God without being molested and laughed to scorn!

A thrill shot through Kateri. From that day on, she studied her chances of escaping to Caughnawaga. Her old friend Anastasia was there, burning her life out in penance and reparation. As for Kanawake, it had lost its attraction for Kateri. Something had died in her heart

when the accusation of immorality was brought up by her aunt.

Kateri's chance soon came. One October day three Christians showed up at Kanawake. As luck would have it, or maybe Providence, Kateri's uncle was absent on a peace-treaty trip to Fort Orange. Kateri discussed her opportunity with the Jesuit and the three Indians from the Praying Castle on the St. Lawrence. Her departure was planned down to the last detail.

Father de Lamberville gave her a letter for Father Cholenec, pastor at Caughnawaga (also known as Sault St. Louis). One wonders how her humility would have withstood the shock had she seen that letter with her own eyes. This is what Father Cholenec read, one eye on the words and one eye on the treasure:

"Kateri Tekakwitha is going to live at the Sault. I beg of you, be so kind as to take her under your direction. You will soon know the treasure we are giving you. So guard it well. In your hands it will be for God's glory, and the salvation of a soul that is assuredly very dear to Him."

Thanks be to God, Kateri would be safe in a village that had become a furnace of apostolic fire. Had not Father Cholenec written, some two years previously, in praise of his Christian Iroquois:

"... (they) live like perfect Christians, who know how to war against their appetites, and to tame their passions by application and reflection; who pass whole days without committing a venial sin maliciously or deliberately; and

who without waiting for Sunday or for the nearest festivals, come and confess themselves at all times on the slightest scruple of conscience. Finally, they are Christians who detest sin, not only in themselves, but also in others.”

In that school of virtue, some 250 miles from Kanawake on the Mohawk River, Kateri continued on moccasined feet her ascent of the mountain of Christian perfection.

## S E V E N

### KATERI'S CONSECRATION

They were doing things grandly at this spot on the St. Lawrence. In summer the first Mass was at five, in winter at a quarter to seven. A second Mass followed immediately, at which everyone in the village made it a point to assist. Then there was a third Mass for the children, after which a short catechetical instruction was given to the small fry.

In no time Kateri had caught up spiritually with the others. And before many moons, she appeared to be standing head and shoulders above the other Christians in holiness of life.

Under the guiding thumb of Anastasia, the Mohawk maid learned the ropes. Anastasia told her about the schedule that was observed daily at the mission. And told



her, too, in little unrehearsed sermons, the facts of sin and contrition, of heaven and hell — the real facts of life and eternity. Kateri soon got used to the new way of life and loved it. When she could pry herself loose from her duties, she made off for her favorite solitary nook. Outside of that, her days were crammed with work at home and devotions in St. Peter's Chapel.

Graces in heaping measure were poured upon her. Father Cholenec, her confessor, who came to know quite accurately the workings of divine grace in her lovely soul, marvelled at the beauty of it. It was plain to him that this child of the wild had received extraordinary gifts of prayer. Apparently she prayed with as little effort as she breathed. Day after day she was rising steadily to higher spiritual levels. Her driving ambition was to please God and avoid whatever might offend Him even slightly.

She was ready for the embrace of the Eucharist. One evening Father Cholenec told Father Fremin: "I believe that the longer period of probation for First Holy Communion, that we usually demand among the Iroquois, should be shortened for Kateri Tekakwitha." When they had talked things over and agreed to relax the rule in her favor, Father Cholenec added: "I shall tell her that she may receive Our Lord on Christmas Day. She will have been here little more than two months; but she is too well disposed to be deprived of this grace."

You couldn't blame the Jesuit for hesitating about letting the Iroquois come to the altar rail. He couldn't easily forget that Indians from Ossernenon had knifed off

slices of Jogues' flesh and eaten it under his own eyes. The strong heart of Brebeuf had been butchered off his mutilated body and eaten by men of Iroquoian stock. More recently the Oneidas had slowly roasted to death a poor woman who had fallen into their clutches.

To people like these, could a priest give the Flesh of the Son of God without qualms of conscience? He had to be cautious. He had to consider the matter not once but a hundred times. It did seem, as Daniel Sargent points out in his book on Kateri, that the minds of the Iroquois had become so tarnished and their lips so defiled, that a long purification of minds and lips had to be undergone before they could grasp, in some small way, the sublime mystery and purpose of sacramental Communion.

On Christmas Day of that year, 1677, Kateri knew that the ciborium contained one Sacred Host for her. Later, harking back to that most blessed of mornings, her confessor said: "All that we can say is that from that day forward she appeared different to us, because she remained so full of God and of love for Him."

She had a long wait for her second Communion. That winter she accompanied the Indians from the Praying Castle on their annual hunt. Like the other women she gathered the game that the men killed, prepared it for eating, and dressed the skins. Too, she made collars of elk or deerskin, belts of wampum, and other pieces of handicraft.

Every morning she sent her Guardian Angel to assist at the Holy Sacrifice in Caughnawaga's little chapel and



implored him to bring some spiritual blessing back to her. Then she ran off by herself somewhere in the woods where she had tied two twigs together in the shape of a cross. With snow all around her and the cold winter wind biting into her body, she knelt to pray. One day her adopted sister Ennita came upon her unawares tramping in the snow without her moccasins. Kateri explained humbly that she wanted to suffer something for Our Lord.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays she skipped breakfast as an act of voluntary mortification. But she was very practical and prudent about it. She was not trying to show off or advertise her good deeds. So if anyone remarked that she was not eating and had better do so, in all simplicity she filled a bowl for herself and ate it without fuss or scruple. When nobody was looking, she sprinkled ashes on her eats.

By Easter they were back from the happy hunting grounds and for the second time Christ came, light and little in the Communion wafer, to His servant Kateri. Shortly after this, she was allowed to join the Confraternity of the Holy Family. Then she took to visiting the sick, praying for the entire mission, and teaching others the duties and beauties of the Christian Faith. Hoping and planning for her consecration-to-come, she prayed: "I offer my soul to Christ the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and my body to Christ the Lord hanging on the cross."

Again she was confronted head-on with the question of a possible marriage. Just about everyone got into the act, coaxing her to consider the question from every angle.

The young woman decided she had heard enough about that and had better settle the matter once for all. At that time she had heard of the vow by which nuns consecrated their virginity to God. She knew something of the evangelical counsels.

She discussed her case with Father Cholenec. In substance he told her: "Take three more days to consider the subject, my child. Pray earnestly and recommend your difficulty to Our Lord, then follow closely whatever He inspires you to do. Remember that you are your own mistress, and in an affair of this kind the decision rests with you. I shall pray with you."

Kateri condensed the "three more days" into fifteen minutes.

Back she came with smiling lips and earnest eyes. "Father," — and she told him everything. How she had renounced the wedded state in order to have Jesus only for her Bridegroom. How she thirsted after poverty and solitude for His sake, because she loved Him.

Kateri's spiritual guide had been very careful not to put such thoughts into her mind. He honestly doubted that the Indians, at that stage in their spiritual growth, were prepared for such private consecrations. So he let God direct Kateri along the path it pleased Him. It so happened that it also pleased her immensely.

"It was on the day of the Annunciation," — Father Cholenec writing — "the twenty-fifth of March, 1679, at eight o'clock in the morning, that Kateri Tekakwitha a moment after Jesus Christ had been given to her in Holy

Communion, gave herself also entirely to Him, and renouncing marriage forever, promised to Him her perpetual virginity, and finally with a heart on fire with love called on Him to deign to be her unique Spouse, and to take herself as His spouse in return.

“She prayed Our Lady that Our Lady might with tender devotion present her to her Divine Son; then wishing to make a double sacrifice in a single act, she at the same time as she gave herself devout to Jesus Christ, consecrated herself wholly to Mary begging her to be from then on her Mother, and to take her as her daughter.”

## EIGHT

### KATERI OF THE CRUCIFIED

The nicest thing that can be said about the friendship between Kateri and that other devout convert, Marie Therese, was that it showed itself to be a union in Christ for mutual help. When Kahenta's daughter went out in search of suffering, she found a kindred spirit that was also deeply preoccupied with the same question. Marie Therese did not seek, any more than Kateri, a rose-strewn path for the simple reason that Jesus Christ had walked along no such path in the days of His mortality.

The priests at Caughnawaga were not inclined to frown upon this strong bond of friendship. They recognized it as a precious opportunity for the spiritual progress of both. Let Kateri and her friend work together, pray together, confer about spiritual verities together. It could only enrich their lives and lead them to greater goodness.

One day Marie Therese mentioned that at the recollection of her personal faults she had once disciplined herself with branches cut off a tree. Her sins were a familiar litany to her, and it may well be that she had not always been a paragon of virtue. But when Kateri heard about the new form of torture, she was not concerned with the other's transgressions. The thought came of a sudden that if Marie Therese had been brave enough to do it, there was no reason why she, Kateri, shouldn't do likewise. When they met again for their spiritual conversation, the latter produced a handful of twigs she had picked up and begged for her bare shoulders to be lashed with them. Marie Therese obliged.

Two years after Kateri's death, one of the French priests at Caughnawaga wrote about her in a letter to France: "During her lifetime she had made an agreement with a friend to make each other suffer, because she was too weak to do so by herself, owing to her continual illness. She had begged her companion to do her the charity of severely chastising her with blows from a whip. This they did for a year, without anyone knowing it, and for that purpose they withdrew, every Sunday, into a cabin in the middle of the cemetery; and there, taking in their hands willow shoots, they mingled prayers with penance."

It is important to stress the fact that Kateri did not make herself suffer because she thought suffering good or sanctifying in itself. Nor did she presume that her body was the enemy of her soul, an enemy to be chastised without mercy and smitten without grace. She understood clear-



ly that the body merely follows the dictation of the soul powers; it is only the instrument of the will behind it, and blaming the poor body for every moral slip is putting the censure in the wrong place. Yet she realized the intimate union between body and soul. And because she wanted her body to share in the glory of the Resurrection, she wanted it to undergo its Passion upon earth. She wanted to suffer with her Savior in order to rejoice with Him eternally.

She loved Christ. She knew what Christ had suffered to show her that He, too, knew the meaning of love. She wanted to return love for love, which often means sacrifice for sacrifice. It was all as simple, all as heroic as that. The grip of the divine life upon her soul called for such an identification with the Man of Sorrows. Pain did not cease to be pain; it became a consecration. Suffering did not cease to be suffering; it became the com-Passion of one who knew that love without the willingness to endure pain is no love at all.

One day she got to talking with Marie Therese about the worst physical agony imaginable. Marie Therese, who did not have Indian blood in her veins for nothing, named fire. Minutes later, both were putting live coals between their bare toes. Marie Therese said she did it for her sins. So did Kateri.

It may be argued, what sins had that angel in the flesh been guilty of? When inflicting harsh penances upon herself, could she say without forcing the truth: "My Jesus, I must suffer for Thee; I love Thee, but I have



offended Thee. It is to satisfy Thy justice that I am here"? According to her biographers, one sin she deplored was what she called her laxness of life prior to her baptism. She remembered the times she had not resisted those who forced her to work on Sundays and holydays — before her baptism, that was. And she admitted that she had often dreaded death more than sin.

Because of these understandable weaknesses, because of the share she thought she had had in gashing the hands of the Crucified with ruddy scars, she willingly suffered things which we shudder to read. One frigid February day, she recited several rosaries while walking up to her waist in snow. Time and time again she was surprised walking barefoot on snow or ice, imposing black fasts on herself, or scourging herself so harshly as to draw bruises and blood.

How sincerely she meant every word when she said: "I am deeply affected by the three nails which fastened Our Lord to the cross. They are but a symbol of my sins."

There were other torments too. Like the time she heard how St. Aloysius Gonzaga, a stickler for mortification, had slept on a bed strewn with thorns. Well, if he had done it . . . For three or four nights in a row, she heaped her bed with thorns and twigs. Then, mercifully, someone's slip of the tongue relayed the news to Father Choleneq and he put a stop to the novel procedure.

Another time Marie Therese said she was going to brand her foot with a hot coal to drive home the idea that she was Our Lord's slave of love. The next day, when

they met again, it was Kateri who had the scar on her foot. Her friend had flinched at the last moment and had abandoned the project.

It is proper to point out that bodily mortification was a language which the Mohawks understood. They knew how to make their victims suffer—and how to make themselves suffer as well. If they could give it, they could also take it. And Kateri's holiness had to have a Mohawk flavor to it. For saints by becoming such do not dehumanize themselves; they simply become more thoroughly human, more like Christ the Perfect Man. They belong to all nations; yet it remains true that one nation in particular has begotten them.

This one of the Five Nations took care not to let her zeal run away with her prudence. Some Christian Indians at the Sault performed far more cruel and ruthless penances than she did. There were some there who rolled naked in the snow or stood up to their necks in half-frozen rivers. The priests were compelled to lecture them in no gentle terms for overdoing it.

Kateri knew the price of things. She had put the proper evaluation on all that could favor her spiritual ascent. Hence her answer to Father Cholenec, who suggested that she accompany the hunters on their winter outing, because food would be scarce if she remained behind: "Father, it is true that the body fares well in the woods, but the soul languishes there and dies of hunger; whereas in the village, the body suffers a little from not being so well nourished, but the soul, being close to Our Lord,

finds entire satisfaction. Therefore I abandon this miserable body to hunger and any other misery, that my soul may be content and have its usual nourishment."

So she partook of the Flesh of the Son of God and His Blood, and she had life abundant in her soul.

There was nothing dreary or teary about her spirituality. No martyr complex. Her confessor has reported that she showed a "surprising gaiety." He said that she "was always gay, always content." If she was upset about anything, she took care not to let it show in her face.

One winter day, Kateri wearing an iron girdle with spikes under her tunic slipped and fell on the ice. The spikes were forced deep into her body. With Marie Therese's help she got shakily back to her feet. Her friend would never have found out about the spikes, had she not suspected from the radiant smile on Kateri's face that she must be up to some holy mischief again.

Kateri spent hours in the chapel, her eyes riveted on the tabernacle. Father Cholenec, seeing her shivering at prayer in the cold chapel, would tell her kindly, "My child, come and warm yourself at our fire."

She allowed herself only a few moments by the fire-side. Then back to the chapel she hurried. A conviction was fast developing in her mind that she had not much longer to live, so she wanted to put every minute to eternal advantage. Once, when Marie Therese suggested that she leave something for the morrows to come, she was greeted with the mysterious answer:

"There will not be many tomorrows, Marie Therese."

Kateri of the Crucified was ripening like a grape on the trellis of the cross. Only a few more tomorrows were required to complete the maturing process. Then the Man on the cross would cull her for His everlasting gardens.

## N I N E

### PRECIOUS IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD

**K**ateri lived through three winters in Canada. The first winter, she accompanied the hunters on their search for game. The second, she stayed behind so that her soul might have it better than her body. The third winter, she was chosen and set apart so that she might know how precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of those who have loved Him.

She had never been robust. She had done her job well, but one sometimes wonders where she got the energy to do it. For one thing, almost all her life long she had suffered from violent headaches, possibly an after-effect of her serious bout with smallpox.

Shortly after she entered her twenty-third year, the permanent headaches came to be accompanied by vomit-

ings and a slow fever. Yet not even that complication of physical ills succeeded in wringing a complaint out of her. As long as she was able to be up and about, she dragged herself regularly to St. Peter's Chapel. Her Treasure was there, behind the tabernacle door, and quite naturally — maybe supernaturally is the better word here — her heart longed to follow It there.

Sometimes she had to cling to a bench to keep herself from collapsing. That one could see. But what one could not see was how she was clinging all the time to Christ her Beloved, for Whose love she had surrendered all that a girl possibly could.

Humanly speaking, Kateri had chosen a poor time to be ill. Just about everyone had gone off in the flurry and excitement of another hunting season. Only a few elderly persons remained behind, and they had their work to do, their chores to look after. All they could do for the sick girl, who spent that long winter in bed, was to bring her the regular bowl of sagamite and a cup of water.

The sheer loneliness of it and the feeling that she was being a burden struck deep into her sensitive nature. Week after week, she lived on; and wondered when God would come for her.

From February on, she was unable to leave her bed. In fact she could not turn in it without intense pain, so she remained day and night in the same position. The thought of her Savior nailed to His cross, unable to move without extreme torture, gave her the courage to go on. She knew that not all crosses are shaped like His; sometimes they



are shaped in the form of an Indian bed bracketed to the wall like a shelf. But what matter shape and form, when the heart's love is there?

Father Chauchetiere, then stationed at Caughnawaga, could not dismiss the Mohawk maid from his mind. Almost daily he managed to find time to pay her a visit. His eyes gleamed with more than usual kindness as he tried to make her last weeks happy with comforting words about God and eternity.

The pictures from the Old and New Testaments which he brought and explained to her gave her endless delight and consolation. So, too, did the frequent calls of the little Indian children. Father made sure that she would have many visits from the littlest ones of the flock. As he saw with increased insight the beauty of her inner self, he was eager to have the children benefit from her example and instructions. She who had vowed herself to God in the headlong generosity of early youth might be His instrument for sowing the seeds of a similar vocation in other young souls.

Inquiries about her health were largely routine at the beginning. But as the winter wore on and the weather showed signs of spring, the Christians saw it could be only a matter of time, and brief at that. More and more people came to visit Kateri, not so much to offer their services as to seek comfort and counsel from her.

On her cross which was not shaped like a cross at all, but which was the genuine article nevertheless, Kateri Tekakwitha preached her greatest sermon. A sermon with

words. But more especially a sermon without words, when the tongue is silent and the examples speak for themselves.

Then the warm world of April mornings. The voices of the returning hunters began to make themselves heard. Somehow Kateri had felt that she would live until their homecoming. But now, like the aged Simeon hugging his God to his heart, she was ready to go. She had planted her roots in eternity. The Lord was preparing to let His servant depart in peace.

On Tuesday in Holy Week, April 16, 1680, she received her last Communion. Here again, another special privilege. The priests were in the habit of restricting the distribution of Communion to people who could come to the chapel. If they were ill, friends carried them on a litter of birch bark. Sure, Kateri had plenty of friends now that the hunting party had returned. And there was plenty of birch bark around for the manufacturing of a litter. But the Christ of the Eucharist wouldn't let her friends go to that trouble. He wanted to come, under the Sacramental Species, because she was someone special. His priests took Him to her.

One thing still bothered the dying Christian. It was Holy Week, a time to add something extra to one's usual penances. "Father," she asked, "may I not perform some act of penance in honor of Our Lord's Passion? Some little thing, my Father. Perhaps going without food for just a day?"

Father Cholenec thought fast, then shook his greying head. What was that dear soul performing there, silent

and serene and helpless, if not a penance most pleasing to God? "Our Lord will accept your good intention, my child. You must think of other things now. You have not long to live."

Kateri understood. She let obedience take over. Obedience, which is often the penance most acceptable in the sight of One Who became obedient unto turning a cross into a crucifix.

Suddenly the priest straightened up, and in three quick steps was at the door. In no time at all, he was back with the articles required for the last anointing. He thought he had detected in Kateri signs that she was fast approaching her last moments, and he chided himself for having postponed the administration of Extreme Unction.

She smiled wanly. Told him he needn't have rushed so; that there was no need to hurry; that he might safely wait until the next day. So wait he did. And in the meantime, a steady stream of visitors poured into the long house to see for themselves that death can be beautiful if the life that precedes it has been beautiful.

On Holy Wednesday in the morning, Kateri was anointed and fortified for the last stretch of the journey to God.

Marie Therese, trying hard to get hold of herself, bent her ear to her friend's lips. "I am leaving you, Marie Therese. I am going to die. Remember always what we have done together since first we met. If you change I shall accuse you before the tribunal of God. Take courage, despise the discouragements of those who have not the faith. I shall pray for you. I shall aid you."

Kateri's face spoke of deep interior peace. Yet she seemed to be waiting for someone. Could she have been waiting for all the Iroquois women to return to the long house? Did she recoil at the thought of dying unless they were there as they had said they wanted to be? God only knows for sure. But Kateri was unmistakably waiting.

When the last late-comer had dropped to her knees, Kateri closed her eyes. It was three o'clock in the afternoon of Holy Wednesday, April 17, 1680. She was scarcely twenty-four years of age.

Fifteen minutes later, Father Cholenec, still upon his knees, noticed that Kateri's face, so ravaged by disease and prolonged austerities, had become clear and beautiful and unblemished. It had found a new beauty in death. Indians awestruck at the wonder of it came and admired and gave glory to God. With simple faith they kissed her hands. Some tore tatters from her dress to keep as souvenirs. Relics, Father Cholenec would have said.

They buried Kateri the next day. It was the anniversary of her baptism. And there was sunshine — both in God's blue skies and in the hearts of the Indians, who thanked the Lord for having so royally and divinely favored one of their race.

Kateri's remains have not shared the peace and repose with which God flooded her soul after death. They have gone places. A part of those remains, carried by pious Iroquois to a new mission near Cornwall, were destroyed by a fire which levelled the site. The only earthly remains of the Mohawk maid, the bones of the lower half

of her body, are today treasured at Caughnawaga. Sealed in a glass-topped casket by a former Bishop of Montreal, they will remain in Caughnawaga until word gets around that she is to be beatified. On that occasion much to be desired and prayed for, the casket will have its seals broken and the major relic will be transferred to Rome for deposition in St. Peter's. Other congregations across America will receive other bones so that devotion to Kateri may spread through the veneration of her relics.

Kateri is well on the way to the honors of the altar. On January 3, 1943, His Holiness Pius XII declared: "It has been proved in this instance and for the purpose under consideration, that the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, Love of God and Neighbor, and the cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, Fortitude, and subordinate virtues of the Venerable Servant of God, Kateri Tekakwitha, were heroic."

There can be no doubt that the entire world, and more especially North American peoples, will rejoice at the glad tidings of Kateri's glorification.

Up until this century, the manufacturers of saints' statues have left the holy ones in their bare blessed feet or politely furnished them with sandals, open-toed or otherwise. But when the Lily of the Mohawks becomes a saint, God willing, the statuaries will have to respect her feminine wishes with regard to acceptable footwear.

Being a Mohawk, she will probably throw them a broad hint:

"Make mine moccasins!"









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