



Catherine Tegakwitha, First Iroquois Virgin Cholenec

CHAPTER IV — KATERI'S LOVE OF GOD

Catherine's admission into the Confraternity of the Holy Family, despite her youth and short period of trial, surprised no one. Her virtues placed her above the rule for the ordinary people of the village, and they, moreover, far from being jealous, generally approved of her election; the members of the Holy Family especially showed their joy, looking upon Catherine as capable of sustaining by herself alone this saintly society by her good example. She was the only one who considered that she herself was unworthy, such humble ideas did she have of herself, but the more she thought of her unworthiness, the more she thought it a duty to work for her perfection, so as not to lower the fervor of this confraternity, to which she gave a new renown by her own. What is certain is that the memory of her alone was sufficient to inspire for a long time, and continues still to inspire, the fervor of many others.

Thus she advanced visibly, and, profiting by everything, she drew from all things both motives and means to grow in grace and holiness, and to attach herself more and more to Our Lord. She already lived the unitive life* in the opinion of a very judi-

cious person who knew her; in fact, she tasted all the sweetness of that blessed state without having passed through preparatory stages. Under special guidance of the Holy Ghost, by exception, she passed through the first two stages (the purgative and illuminative), into the unitive, and conducted herself with ever greater merit and in a more excellent manner, for in her intimate communications with God she was filled with new inspirations, inspirations filled with ardor and zeal. These at once enlightened her understanding to make her see the beauty of the Christian virtues with reference to Jesus Christ, Whom she always had before her eyes, and at the same time touched her will to put them into practice and to conform herself, as much as lay within her power, to so perfect and at the same time so amiable a model.

By means of these inspirations, she even went as far as to seek in her past for new motives for loving Him and hating herself, looking upon her smallest shortcomings, committed while living among the Iroquois, as on so many crimes and outrages against the Divine Majesty; and on account of them she chastised her body that was so innocent,

*Union with God in perfect charity.

looking upon it as guilty. These shortcomings were one of the principal reasons for the austere life she led at the Sault and of that great thirst she had for mortification and suffering. Her instructress, on her part, contributed to this by often speaking to her of the pains of hell, of the terrible penances the saints imposed on themselves so as to avoid them and which the Iroquois Christians had all the more reason to perform, because they had so often offended Our Lord amid the disorders of their country. She was still more spurred on to this by an accident that befell her at this time and which almost took her from our midst when we were just beginning to know her. One day, as she was cutting down a tree in the forest, it fell sooner than she expected; her quickness saved her from being struck by the trunk, but one of the branches caught her as she fled, and hit her head with such force that it knocked her senseless. They thought at first she was dead, but she came to a little later, softly whispering: "O Jesus, I thank You for having rescued me from danger." The only conclusion she drew from it was that God had preserved her so that she might do penance for her sins. This she declared to that dear companion, who played such a great part in her life, and of whom we must speak now, as forming part of the history we are writing.

CHAPTER V

KATERI STRONG IN FRIENDSHIP

In the spring of the year 1678 God gave a companion to Catherine who aided her greatly in her progress, and from whom we have learned several important things concerning her, since this girl was the only one who really had her confidence, and to whom she communicated her most intimate thoughts and actions since they met one another. Catherine, it is true, until that time had nev-

er wished to attach herself to any one except the good Anastasia, whose authority, since she had taken her mother's place, and frequent exhortation in the capacity of instructress, had greatly aided Catherine in taking the right course of action she now pursued; but this good Anastasia was advanced in age and could not increase the fervor of her pupil who had already surpassed her and who performed actions of which the other was not capable. She needed a companion more of her own age, one who had the same resolution of giving herself entirely to God, and who was capable of leading the same kind of austere life that she herself had embraced. God, therefore, let her find such a companion in the person of a young woman. She was of the Onondaga nation and had been baptized in their country by Father Bruyas, now rector of the College of Quebec and Superior-General of our mission in Canada, after having been in charge of the Iroquois missions in particular, and after having governed the mission of the Sault, which he had kept for eleven years in the good order in which Father Frémin, his predecessor, had placed it.

This woman, whom we shall not name, since she is still living,* had degenerated a great deal after her Baptism, and among the disorders of her country, the only thing Christian about her was her name, even after she had come to live at the Prairie with her family. At first she was no better there. She went to the hunt with her husband, who was not yet a Christian, and fortunately she found there the cause of her conversion in an event that happened to her, which I am going to relate here in a few words for the satisfaction of the reader, and to show what means God took to convert this Indian who was to contribute so much to the holiness of Catherine.

Mary had departed at the beginning of

*Mary Teresa Tegaiguenta.

the autumn with her husband and a young child, a son of her sister, to go hunting by the river Ottawa. On the road they were met by some other Iroquois with whom they joined, making approximately eleven people, four men, four women, and three children. Ill-fate ordained it that snow fell very late that year, so that they were unable to hunt, and after they had eaten their provisions and the meat from an elk, which her husband had killed, they were soon reduced to hunger. First they ate some small skins which they had brought with them to make shoes, and later ate even their own shoes, and were finally reduced to herbs and the bark of trees even as animals.

In the meanwhile, Mary's husband became sick and then two men of the group, a Mohawk (Agnie) and a Seneca, Tsonnontouan, went hunting, intending to return, at the very latest, in ten days. The Mohawk, indeed, returned within the appointed time, but alone, assuring them that his comrade had died of hunger; but it was not without reason that they suspected him of having killed his friend and subsisted on the flesh while he was away. They doubted him even more because he was in such good health, and because he admitted that he had killed nothing. Because they had no longer hope of securing anything from these hunters, and since he was no longer of any use, they wished to persuade the Christian woman to let her husband die, in order to save herself, her nephew and all the others. She would not consent to it and generously and steadily resisted it.

They, therefore, abandoned her, together with her husband and nephew; two days later the sick man died, regretting that he had not yet been baptized. After she had buried him, she sought the road again, carrying her nephew on her shoulders, and in a few days rejoined the band who were seeking the road down the river to the French village. But they were so weak and exhausted

after their twenty days of wandering, that at last they took the following resolution. In their last extremity, seeing their end before them, they decided to kill one of the number that the rest might live. They cast their eyes on the widow of the Seneca and his two children, and asked our Christian woman whether it were permissible to kill them, and what the Christian law was on this point, because she was the only one of the band who had been baptized. Not being sufficiently enlightened, she did not dare to answer such an important question, fearing lest she should contribute to a homicide; but she also feared, and not without reason, that her own life depended on the answer, believing that they would kill her after they had eaten the woman and her two children, which later they did.

Tegaiguenta's eyes were opened by the danger to her body, and she began to realize the deplorable state of her soul, which was more to be pitied than that of her body. She felt great horror for the sins of her past life, and her great fault in coming to the hunt without going to confession and she asked God's forgiveness from the bottom of her heart, promising Him that if He delivered her from this danger, and brought her safely to the village, not only would she confess herself immediately, but would reform her life and do penance. God, Who wished to use this woman to make Catherine known, heard her prayer, and after much trial and suffering, there arrived at the Prairie, in mid-winter, five of the twelve who had gone to the chase, and among them were this woman and her little nephew. She kept part of the promise she had made, taking care to go to confession on her return, but she deferred for some time her reform and the penance she had promised.

This happened in the winter of 1675, and in the beginning of 1676. The fall of this same year the mission was transferred from the Prairie Madeleine to the Sault St. Louis.

In autumn of 1677 Catherine came to live there and in the following spring, that is to say, in 1678, she became acquainted with this companion in the following manner. The first chapel of the Sault was then under construction. One day Catherine walked around this building merely to see how the work progressed, as did the Christian of whom we speak. But God had planned this unexpected meeting, for His glory and the good of these two souls. They greeted and spoke to each other for the first time. Catherine asked where the women would sit in the new church; and the other, in reply, showed her where she thought their place would be. Catherine replied that this chapel of wood was not what God asked most of us, but that He longed rather for our souls, that He might dwell and make His temple in them, and that she did not deserve to enter this material chapel, as she had so often driven God from her heart, and merited rather to be put out with the dogs.

These sentiments of profound humility, uttered with tears and with words of grace, touched the other even more because she did not expect them, and were indeed for her words of life, grace, and salvation. Moved by remorse, she soon resolved to carry out the principal part of the promise she had made while on the hunt. She was of a fiery temperament and went to extremes in good or evil; was possessed of great energy, and was also in the prime of her life, that is to say, about twenty-eight or thirty years of age. She gradually became enlightened while listening to Catherine, believing that what she said came from God, and that He had sent this holy girl, of whom so much good was spoken, to help her change her life, as she had promised to do.

Then she told Catherine her ideas, and they found that both their hearts and their

plans were in perfect accord. They became friends during this first interview, and one word leading on to another, they communicated their most secret thoughts to each other. In order to talk more easily, they seated themselves at the foot of a cross near the bank of the river. They told each other of their past lives, and resolved to unite themselves in order to do penance. As I was their spiritual director, they spoke to me of this union and asked for my approval, which I gladly gave, seeing that it would be good for both of them.

From this time on they became one in heart and soul, and were inseparable until Catherine's death, after which she was always in her companion's mind. Although Catherine did not neglect Anastasia, and still occasionally visited with her, she nevertheless devoted herself entirely to this second companion who was more zealous, and able to help her more in her devotions. They could be seen going to the woods, fields and everywhere together, avoiding meeting other girls and women. This they did not only to avoid the trivial affairs of the village, but also in order not to swerve from their devotions. They spoke only of God and of things pertaining to Him. Their conversations were as so many spiritual conferences, in which they disclosed to each other their lives, their desires, and their slightest trials, in order to encourage each other to remain firm under all conditions and to suffer something for Our Lord. Several times during the week they went deep into the woods and there chastised their shoulders with rods, as Catherine had been doing by herself for a long time.

CHAPTER VI—FORTITUDE UNDER TRIAL

It was in this way that from day to day God fortified Catherine Tegakwitha and that

He prepared her soul for the great trial which she had to undergo this summer, a trial touching on that which was most sensitive to her, but from which, with the grace of Our Lord, she came out victorious. As it is one of the most beautiful passages in the story of her life, I believe that it will not be displeasing to recount it here, interrupting this narrative to do so.

Her adopted sister, who acted as mistress of the home, also pretended by right of age to have authority over her person, and regarded this younger sister in a worldly manner. She tried to persuade her to marry, rather for the use which she could be to her than for Catherine's own good. Catherine was held in such great esteem throughout the village because of her wisdom and *ety* that there was not a young man at the Sault who would not have been happy to be a party to such marriage, considering himself fortunate to have found so good a wife. But this woman, who had to choose from among them, did not fail to select for brother-in-law a brave hunter who would provide in abundance for the cabin, for among the savages it was the custom to give all that the husband brought from the hunt to the women of the cabin. It would be of great benefit to the family if she could succeed in her plan.

She foresaw great difficulty with Catherine, whom she knew to be adverse to marriage, nor did she ignore the persecutions which this generous girl had suffered in her own country about the same thing, and the constancy with which she had surmounted them. She hoped, however, to win her over on the strength of the reasons which she had prepared, and resolved not to be dissuaded, but either to gain her consent or else force her in this matter. She took Catherine aside one day, and with a seemingly affectionate and sweet manner, she attempted to convince her by the following discourse. This the reader will not find difficult to believe if



From a painting of Kateri at Caughnawaga, Canada

he knows that the Indians are clever and have good sense, and that, even as other people, they are naturally eloquent, especially when they have a point to gain.

"It must be admitted, Catherine, my dear sister, that you have a great obligation to Our Lord for having brought both you and us from our miserable country, and for leading you to the Sault where you can work for your salvation in peace of mind, without anything to trouble your devotion. If you are happy to be here, I am not less happy to see you here with us. Increase this happiness by your wise conduct, which will draw on you the esteem and approbation of the whole village. There is just one thing which you can do which will make me entirely pleased with you, and which will make you yourself perfectly happy—that is to think seriously of establishing yourself by a good, sound marriage.

"This is the course followed by all the girls

here; you are of a marriageable age, and you need it, even as the others, to withdraw you from the occasions of sin and to supply you with the necessities of life. It is not because it is not a pleasure for your brother-in-law and myself to provide for you, as we have done heretofore, but you know that he is getting old and we have a large family, so that if anything should happen to us and we could not help you, where would you look for aid? Believe me, my dear sister, you should place yourself as soon as possible beyond the possibility of the pains of poverty for the good of both your soul and body, and think seriously of how to avoid them while you are able to do so easily, and with such advantage for yourself and for your whole family who desire it."

Catherine was strangely surprised by her sister's discourse, on whom she relied for nothing. Nevertheless, because she was very honest and had great respect for her sister, she did not show the pain which this caused her. She even thanked her for her good advice, and added that as the affair was of such great importance she wished to think it over at leisure. Our courageous virgin, far from being offended, eluded the first attempt by this clever and unsuspected trick, and immediately sought me to complain a little of her sister, and to tell me of the whole affair. "Catherine," I then said to her, "you are the judge in this matter. It is entirely up to you alone, but think well, for it is a concern of great moment." She replied immediately, and without hesitation, "Ah! my father, I will not marry. I do not like men and have the greatest aversion to marriage. The thing is impossible." In order to sound and test her more, I dwelt on the strong reasons which her sister had presented to her. She assured me with great firmness that the thought of poverty did not frighten her, that her work would always furnish her with what she needed to eat, and that a few rags

would be enough to cover her. Then I sent her back assured that what she was doing was right.

Catherine did not tell me everything in this interview. In her own mind she had already decided her course. Although it may be said that she was already perfect in her present state, she was not contented, because her predominating passion was to seek always what was best in our holy religion, and that which would make her more pleasing to God, telling her in the depths of her heart that there was something over and above the common life of the Sault. She had even learned, I do not know how, that there were some people who performed extraordinary penances, and she complained gently to her companion that the missionaries had kept this hidden from her. Moreover, she had some knowledge of the Evangelical Counsels, and she had a beautiful example of their practice in the Religious Hospitallers of Montreal. After considering all things well, Catherine and her companion agreed never to marry, the one to dedicate to God her virginity, and the other her perpetual widowhood. They kept this decision a secret, and resolved not to speak of it unless absolutely necessary.

Catherine, however, found she could not help herself on this occasion, because of her sister's pressing insistence. She hesitated to let her know that the affair was already concluded; but it seemed to the other that she had had time enough to make up her mind, so that she asked for her decision with great eagerness. Therefore, this chaste girl, wishing to silence her sister, and to stop her annoying solicitations, told her that she had renounced marriage, and asked to be allowed to live as she was. As for the rest, she said that she had enough clothes for a long time, that she would work in order to feed herself and would not be a burden to her sister, or anyone in the village.

(To be continued.)

December is a Tekakwitha month. It is crowded with feasts that mean much to every Catholic. There is the great modern Apostle, Francis Xavier, after whom Kateri's chapel in Canada was in her time named; the church now bears that name. Then comes the extraordinary bishop, Ambrose, the Apostles, Thomas and St. John, the Proto-Martyr Stephen, the redoubtable Martyr, Thomas of Canterbury, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and the great day of the year, the Birthday of Our Lord, Christmas Day.

Long before the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady was declared a dogma of our religion, about two hundred years before, the Bishop of all the territory that is now the United States and Canada, Francois de Laval, chose that title of the Blessed Virgin for his cathedral in Quebec. Tekakwitha lived in a mission comparatively near the seat of the vast diocese, and would naturally come to know about this great prerogative of the Mother of God.

Christmas Day, 1677, was chosen for Catherine's First Communion, an extraordinary favor for one who had been in the mission not much longer than a month, since the missionaries were so particular about keeping the Indians under long trial before admitting them to the Sacraments.

So December is a Tekakwitha month.

Until Catherine is canonized, a church cannot be built in her name, but one can be built in her honor with name of one of the great Saints Catherine.

"Dear Father: I had the privilege," writes His Excellency, Bishop Carroll of Calgary, Canada, "of dedicating this church in memory of Kateri Tekakwitha in honor of her patronesses—St. Catherine, on October 25. Father Levern's campaign in Kateri's honor has begun to take effect."

Most of the money for this building, one that does credit to its architect, Father McGinnis of Banff, was obtained through a novena by the Indian children in honor of Tekakwitha. It is at St. Mary's, ten miles from the Blood Reserve, Cardston P.O. It was built by Indians with their twenty teams under the direction of their pastor, Father Charon.

And now the image of Tekakwitha in wood has gone into a corner-stone with some of her leaflets. That was done in St. John's Hospital, Springfield, Ill. Only things of historic importance go into corner-stones.

Notice on next page how agreeable messages continue to come from Indians themselves as well as from their missionaries. From De Smet, Idaho, comes word:

"The relic you sent me has caused quite a furor on its own score. The Indians point now to the little boy who had pneumonia: 'See, he is the one cured by Tekakwitha.' They 'pester' me about procuring a relic for themselves and devotion has grown apace. Sister Mary Pius wrote you about her eyes, and a novena saved one, I am sure, from a goiter operation. In fact, my entire condition of health has changed without any other cause. It is quite the thing to call for the relic when there is a sick one in the camp."

". . . Things are much better with the Club. You will be glad to hear that fifty-one women enrolled in the Kateri Club on the Feast. The Rosary was said in Indian for the benefactors. It was most impressive to see them walk up for their medals newly-blessed. They were very much thrilled, as one said, to see a real Indian on a medal. I doubt if you ever gave medals to a group which appreciated them more. Thank you again sincerely. . . ."

"My Indians are getting to know Kateri and have confidence in her because she belongs to their race. —Cardston, Canada.

"I did get the money for which I asked you to invoke Catherine, and I am very thankful," is a pleasant word from Montreal.

"My mother, who was so very ill last summer with pneumonia and heart trouble, recovered miraculously and is as well as we can expect her to be at her age."

—Milwaukee, Wis.

A Mother Superior writes from Chihuahua, Mexico, she asked Tekakwitha for money to save her school, "where we are in persecution. Now I paid 10,000 pesos because this little maiden gave me this sum."

"I asked Catherine Tekakwitha to go to the Blessed Mother that she intercede to her Divine Son to help my son, a Priest, that he could repair his church properties, and in a very short time the request was answered."

—Pittston, Pa.

Angeline Standing Bull writes from Gordon, Neb.: "Last summer my mother was real sick, so I put a holy card on which was a picture and a piece of silk that had touched the relic of Tekakwitha, asking her to help my mother, who is well and happy now."

All the way from Bloody Reserve, Matheson Island, Canada, comes the report: "This spring, going to a mission, I found a young man very sick with consumption for over a year, and I gave him a reliquary of her. Two months after I went again to see him, thinking that he was to die soon. I was very surprised to find him very much improved."

"Recently a member of my family borrowed a sum of money from a friend. Un-

expectedly the person asked for the return of the money. As we had no way of paying it at the present time we asked or I should say requested Kateri Tekakwitha to help us in this difficulty. From a very unexpected source we received our request."—Brooklyn.

"We promised to publish the following favor, if granted through the intercession of Kateri; it has been granted, thank God. My brother, married, with two young children, was nearly distracted looking for a house. . . . He is a railway employee, who had been victimized through a strike and had only been reinstated a short time, when he heard the company had a vacant house, he applied without having a ghost of a chance. However, we just got to know about Kateri, so we all decided to start a Novena to her and on the day it was finished, word came through that the company had given him the house."—Miss Nora Toole, Tralee, Kerry, Eire.

Better late than never: "(1) My sister was very ill with a kidney disorder. Tekakwitha's relic was applied, but there was no improvement until several weeks later. I learned that the day the change came, it was Tekakwitha's birthday or the day of her death. It was some time in April. This occurred two years ago. (2) My mother asked Tekakwitha to please send her some money which was needed badly. After saying the prayer, she went to the store; on her return we received five hundred dollars. In our excitement we forgot Tekakwitha. Please accept our belated thanks. This, too, is two years past."—Brooklyn, N. Y.

This monthly message, *THE LILY OF THE MOHAWKS*, is published monthly, 60 cents a year; \$1.00 for 2 subscriptions. It is edited by the V. Postulator of the Cause of Tekakwitha.

Rev. John J. Wynne, S.J., 226 East Fordham Road, New York