



Catherine Tegakwitha, First Iroquois Virgin Cholenec

CHAPTER VII—HER FIRMNESS WINS HER OPPONENTS

When Tekakwitha's sister by adoption heard her decision not to marry, she exclaimed, "My sister, how did you form such a strange resolution? Have you thought seriously of what you are doing? Have you ever seen or heard tell of such a thing among the Iroquois girls? Where did you get this strange idea? Can you not see that you expose yourself to the derision of men and the temptations of the devil? Can you expect to accomplish what no girl among us has ever done? Forget these thoughts, my dear sister; do not trust your own strength, but follow the custom of the other girls."

To all this Catherine replied, without emotion, that she did not fear the jeers of men as long as she did nothing wrong, and that she hoped that God would give her the necessary strength to overcome all the temptations of the devil with which she was threatened, and, since her resolution was already taken, she begged her again not to speak of it any more. It is true that this woman did not dare to speak of it again to Catherine, but she told Anastasia, the mistress of the cabin, who took the place of a mother for both of them. She knew how to present her arguments so as to win Anastasia to her side. The affair seemed even more strange because

there was no precedent for it, and it appeared difficult and almost morally impossible. It is certain that several persons of her age and sex who tried to restrain themselves after her death found it difficult, and admitted that they had not the strength to overcome temptation because this manner of life was so opposed to that of the Indian. The most they could do was to remain widows even though young, and, in renouncing a second marriage, at least to have some small part in Catherine's crown.

Anastasia, therefore, who was a wise woman and weighed all these reasons, feared that her daughter Catherine had taken this resolution lightly and with too much precipitation, and that she would regret it in the future; so she did all in her power to change her decision, but she did not succeed any more than the other had. Because she urged her so insistently, Catherine replied in a more than usually firm voice, that if she thought so highly of marriage, she would enter that state, but that she wished to hear no more on the subject, and that no man would mean anything to her. They separated, and both came immediately to me, Anastasia to complain of Catherine, and Catherine of Anastasia. The youngest reached me first, and told

me of the suffering caused her by her mother and sister, who urged her to marry, and that she found it impossible to obey them. In order to relieve her of her suffering and to settle the matter, I told her to take three more days to consider the subject, to pray earnestly during that time and recommend her trouble to Our Lord, that I would unite with her in prayer, and that she should adhere closely to whatever God inspired her after the three days, and reminded her that she was her own mistress, and that in an affair of this sort, the decision would always rest with her alone.

Catherine agreed with this plan, but the Holy Ghost influenced her so strongly that she took only a few minutes to deliberate on the choice which she had made a long time before, and I was surprised to see her returning, a moment after she had left, to tell me, in an embarrassed manner, that she could not live any longer in a state of indecision. She declared plainly that she had renounced marriage in order to have only Jesus Christ for her Spouse, and that she would consider herself happy to live in poverty and misery for His love. I admit here that, in good faith, I wished to say nothing to Catherine to determine her in this affair, since among the Indians there were so many things opposed to it. I preferred to let God influence His creature directly, not doubting that all would be successfully concluded, if her inspiration came from Him. It was plain to me from her last words that God spoke through the mouth of Catherine, and that He Himself had inspired a decision so heroic. I finally took her part and praised her resolution, and encouraged her to persevere with the same fervor with which she had begun, assuring her that I would defend her against the others, and that neither I nor the other missionaries would ever abandon her or let her be in want of anything.

I can give assurance that by these few words I drew Catherine's soul from a strange

purgatory, putting her in a sort of paradise, because at that moment she truly entered into the joy of the Lord, and she began to feel, in the depths of her soul, a peace, a rest, and a contentment so great that her exterior became quite changed. It is remarkable that this peace never left her until her death, and that from that time on nothing was able to disturb it—an evident sign that the spirit of God animated her. She thanked me warmly, and if she left me the most contented person in the world, I, for my part, was filled with admiration for so heroic a design, full of veneration for her who had the courage to undertake it, and full of extraordinary joy, seeing that Divine Goodness had prepared in this Iroquois virgin such a beautiful model of sanctity for the mission, and such a powerful advocate in heaven.

She had no sooner left me than Anastasia came to make her complaint, saying that Catherine did not wish to marry, even though she was of a marriageable age. I answered her coldly that I was astonished that she wished to torment Catherine about a matter which deserved so much praise, and that she who had been a Christian for such a long time had not opened her eyes to the beauty and merit of such a saintly resolution; and that, far from objecting, if she had any faith, she should esteem Catherine more, and feel happy and honored herself because God had chosen a young girl from her cabin to raise the banner of virginity among the Indians, and to teach them this sublime virtue which makes men like angels. A more sudden change could not be imagined, and Anastasia seemed to awake as from a profound sleep, blaming herself for her conduct. She took the correct view of Catherine's attitude, and, as she herself was very holy, admired, praised and encouraged her, and looked upon her as already a saint. After this she was always ready to support her in the life she had chosen as the better part. She did more, for she inspired the same senti-

ments in Catherine's sister, and both of them regarded her with greater respect and a kind of veneration. They left her in peace, and at entire liberty to do as she pleased in the future. It was thus that Our Lord turned this persecution to the glory and good of His servant, in order to make known that He was the sole Author of this resolution which seemed so strange, and which was new and unprecedented among the Indian girls.

Catherine, delivered from all her apprehensions, was able to do what she judged best, hindered by no one. She thought only of thanking Our Lord for all the graces which she had received from Him, and of corresponding to them with gratitude and reciprocal love. Her companion, to whom she did not fail to recount the whole affair, strengthened and aided her, trying always to profit by the sentiments which Catherine communicated to her, and by the beautiful example which she had always before her eyes. "Oh!" she often said to herself, "if an innocent girl so conducts herself, what should not a sinner like myself do?" So it was that Catherine's fervor lighted the fire of Divine Love in her companion's heart, and her own determination to follow was a great help to Catherine's fervor. She continued all her exercises of piety of which we have already spoken, and fortified them by a fervent reception of the Sacraments, which were a source of grace because of the holy dispositions which she brought to them. She also recommenced, infirm though she was, to chastise her body by continual work, by night vigils, by fasting, and by all sorts of austerities which she could do in secret with only her companion to witness and join her in them.

CHAPTER VIII—FERVOR AT THE SAULT

The summer having passed, they proposed that she should go to the woods for the winter, but she would not hear of it, protesting that she would never again do so. As we

have already said, she had taken this resolution because of the pain she suffered the winter before in being far from the church and the Holy Sacraments, and in being deprived of all the spiritual aids that she had in the village. I wished to take her on the hunt to restore her health a little, where she would not lack the good nourishment she needed and could not have in the village, where, for staying, she would suffer through need of it, as the winter was long.

Catherine only laughed at this, and a moment later she assumed that devout mien which she had when she came to tell me of her spiritual desires, and gave me this answer, worthy of Tegakwitha. "Ah! my 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." She, therefore, remained in the village for the entire winter, and found what she so eagerly sought, that is, crosses for sustenance, and all the sweetness of heaven for her spirit. These she procured for herself as was her custom. Our Lord, Who has promised to sustain those who hunger and thirst after justice, gave to her with equal profusion.

As we have remarked before, the mission of the Sault was at that time very fervent under the guidance of its holy missionaries. It was a new church, possessed of extraordinary graces, and the holiness which prevailed there was worthy of the early Church. The Iroquois had become strongly attached to the church, and these ardent and brave neophytes had conceived such sorrow and shame for the sins of their past lives that even though these had been effaced by Baptism, they still performed great penances for them. Several times a week some of them

chastised their bodies until they bled; others, while gathering firewood, wore iron bands around their bodies for entire days. Joseph Togoniron, the famous captain of the Sault, renowned in this country for his bravery under the name of the great Anie, wore one every Friday and on all the great feasts. Paul Honoguenhag, an appointed ancient, and the first Christian of the Sault, did as much penance; and another, called Etienne, was of such austere virtue that it gave one devotion merely to see him pray. Such were the men. The women, who always go to extremes, did all this and more. Some rolled in the snow, as I saw one young woman do three nights in succession, during the severest weather that I have seen in Canada. Another, in similar cold, which was accompanied by such a heavy snowstorm that it was impossible to see or to keep one's footing, stripped to the waist, held herself erect on the bank of the river, and recited her entire rosary while in this strange posture.

It must be noted that in the Indian language the Angelic Salutation is twice as long as in English. Others went further than this. In mid-winter, having broken the ice with their hatchets, they plunged themselves up to their necks in pools and rivers. Often they had the courage to recite several decades of the beads while enduring this frightful torment. They came out with a shirt of ice around their bodies. One of them did this in the woods on three successive nights, with this result, that, returning to the cabin and not daring to dry herself near the fire for fear of disclosing her penance to the others, as her humility equalled her fervor, she passed the rest of the night on her mat still wearing her coat of ice. On the third night she developed such a violent fever that she thought she was going to die. Ann, the wife of the good Christian Etienne, who equalled her husband in virtue, was not satisfied with plunging herself into the icy river, but she

also plunged in her little daughter, Marie, aged three, and pulled her out half dead. When I blamed her later for this action, I asked her what motive had led her to do it. She answered simply and in good faith, that she feared that when the child grew older she would become slack and fall into sin, so she had forced her to do penance in advance.

I had charge of the greater number of these people, but all of these things were daily occurrences in the woods, where these fervent Christians believed that everything was permitted them. The woman who plunged into the icy river on consecutive nights, and who was not accustomed to go on the hunt, only went this time because I would not allow her to do as she wished in the village, saying to herself: "At least I shall be mistress of my own body in the woods." She admitted this when they brought her to me more dead than alive. All we could do in these cases was to prevent a repetition of these excesses which the good intentions and lack of understanding of the new Christians rendered somewhat excusable.

I admit that these excesses are not always a sure mark of sanctity, as vanity and self-love may creep into them. We have, however, reason to believe that in our Christians they were a true mark, since they persevered for the rest of their lives. They lived in great innocence, union and charity, especially as regards the poor and sick, and did not content themselves in working for their own salvation, but were also zealous for their compatriots who came to the Sault, either to visit or live with them. They could be seen instructing them all day, and even at night, and since these newcomers did not immediately go from one extreme to the other, and necessarily brought with them some kind of levity, the least disturbance which they caused threw the whole village into consternation. In order to prevent this, the men and women of the Holy Family Confrater-

city made the rounds of the cabins, willingly foregoing their sleep in order to prevent God's being offended.

CHAPTER IX—FERVOR BEGETS ZEAL

The zeal of these fervent Christians extended beyond the great river to Montreal. A great number of people at that time descended from the Outaouacs to trade in the city. Our natives were also accustomed to go there to profit by the general trade. The great Anie and another ancient of the Sault, more interested in the things of God than in their own affairs, there performed a deed worthy of eternal commemoration. It is well known that these trading times were days of drunkenness and impurity. These two Christians, making use of the influence which they had among the Indians, assembled the girls and women in a place apart, and then guarded this camp all night long, preventing the women from leaving or the men from entering it.

The same two, along with the good Etienne of whom we have spoken, went to their own country to preach the Gospel in the village of the Mohawks. During the time they spent there they preached all day long in the lodges, and, without taking any rest, received during the night those who came to see them for advice in their difficulties. All this they did during a time of drunkenness, thus making our Faith triumph in the midst of this Babylon. They preached quite openly, without fear of being killed by the drunkards. Their zeal was not in vain, for God blessed their work and they secured great fruits for our religion. Our priests, who lived in these villages, were so edified, consoled, and aided in their office by these three Indians that they sent us letters full of praise for them, imploring the missionary of the Sault to send them similar help from time to time, as it would be of much value to them. Such were the first Christians of the mis-



KATERI (CATHERINE TEGAKWITHA)
LILY OF THE MOHAWKS

sion of the Sault, and although the free use of firearms in the war which followed and the cursed trade of liquor ruined our work and caused a great change, nevertheless, thanks be to God, we still had among the Indians a large number who preserved themselves in innocence and fervor for many years.

Such great and beautiful actions deserve to be known and praised by all, but those who performed them had as much humility as fervor, and knew how to hide their mortification so well, that except for the missionaries nearby, no one knew of them. In spite of anything that was said, several in the village had doubts of themselves.

Catherine was among this number, and she, who had such a keen and penetrating spirit, thought that there was something over and above this extraordinary piety of the

Sault, something hidden in the lives of these fervent Christians, which was the source or support of their virtue. Finally she reached such a high degree of virtue that she discovered part of it and guessed the rest, so that to satisfy her I was obliged to give her a discipline and a little girdle of iron which she used from that time on to quench her extreme thirst for suffering. If I had left her to herself in this matter, she would soon have surpassed the others, but her strength was not nearly equal to her courage. It was necessary to moderate the latter in order not to exhaust the former, because in spite of all the precautions I took, she managed to evade me at times, as happened that same winter on the Feast of the Purification.

In order in some measure to imitate the holy ceremonies of the Church in the procession customary to that day, and so as to give Our Lady some proof of the love she bore her, Catherine walked around her field, which was fairly long, and recited her rosary several times, buried up to her waist in the snow. In her great and glorious title of virgin, however, Catherine was more blessed than others and attained a higher place, not only among the Indians of the Sault, but also among all those of northern France who embraced the faith; because she was the first in that new world, who by a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost consecrated her virginity to Our Lord, and who from pure choice and an ardent desire to please God, embraced that state so perfect in itself and so sublime that God the Son Himself thought He could not better express its virtue and merit than by comparing it to that of the angels in Heaven, "They shall be like the angels of God," even as He compared the state of the angels to that of the virgins upon earth, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto ten virgins."

Among the Fathers of the Church, disputing with holy zeal to discover which of Our

Lady's virtues rendered her most pleasing in the eyes of God and worthy of being His mother, there are some who think with reason that it is her virginity. They think that she, by being the greatest among all pure creatures who, by an express desire raised the divine standard of virginity in the world, surpassed all the grace, perfection, and sanctity of all the other saints together. I say the same regarding an act so heroic as that done by this young virgin in following the example of the Queen of Virgins. It was her greatest glory before God, and considering her from that aspect alone, it is not surprising that she deserved to receive so many graces during her lifetime, and to bring about such great miracles after her death. God had preserved her for this even among the Iroquois for more than twenty years in angelic purity of soul and body in the midst of corruption. She herself aided in this preparation by renouncing marriage, contrary to the custom of the other girls, and by generously rising above the persecutions which she suffered on this occasion in her country.

Almost as soon as she arrived at the Sault, Catherine resolved to lead a life of virginity; she kept this a secret until, again being persecuted, she was obliged to disclose her decision. After Catherine had declared herself, she would have preferred to accomplish her purpose without further delay, so much did she wish to belong wholly to Our Lord, and as soon as possible to make Him the entire sacrifice of her person by an irrevocable pledge. The thing was so unusual, however, and appeared so incompatible with the life of the Indians, that I thought it best not to precipitate matters, so as to give her plenty of time to weigh a matter of such consequence. After I had tried her for some time, however, I noted the great progress she made in every kind of virtue.

(To be continued.)

Happy and Holy New Year to all friends of Tekakwitha. Through her thousands and thousands have been made happy. May they be still more favored, and may their number increase!

The Feast of the Holy Family occurs this year on January 8. It was a special honor for Tekakwitha to be received into this Confraternity of the Holy Family when she was still very young and without the usual time of probation which others had to pass. The origin and extraordinary devotion of the Confraternity were told in her Life by Cholenec in the December number of *THE LILY OF THE MOHAWKS*. It still exists.

Instead of Tekakwitha Leaflets *I* and *II*, there is now only one. The cures that were reported in *I* and the temporal favors in *II* are now combined in a single leaflet and the latest information about the Cause of Tekakwitha is given on page 4. The Novena leaflet is still the same.

The brief Life of Kateri Tekakwitha, by Wynne, is now only 12 cents a copy, postpaid. Formerly it was 25 cents. The reason for reducing the price by one-half is to enable helpers in the Cause for the beatification of the Indian Maiden to make her better known by distributing copies of this romantic story of her.

The *French Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, published at 1961, rue Rachel Est, Montreal, has begun to publish favors attributed to the intercession of Tekakwitha which are reported by its readers, chiefly in Canada. It also announces a list of articles to be used in making Kateri better known and in developing interest in her Cause. This will be welcome news to the many who used to apply to us for such material in French. A brief Life of Catherine, and leaflets, may now be had in French, Spanish, Italian and German.

A devoted Sister Indian missionary writes: "My father won the election again by a miracle. He called me from Oakland to tell me so and thank Tekakwitha. Every machine, bigot and what-not Republican drove the votes against him in the first returns, but Dad came out thirteen thousand votes ahead. He has been wearing *my* relic since a heart attack nearly finished his political and every other career. Kateri needs him in Washington . . . for a Congressional stick over the Indian Bureau.

"Even more, surprisingly, did it mean to have a relic for my Chicago orphan who has entered Quigley Preparatory. He was Slick Johnny when I first met him in the orphanage with nobody caring whether he lived or died. Womanlike, I make myself think that interest and affection lifted his head a bit. No one can understand what it means to a nun to help give a priest to God."

—De Smet, Idaho.

Dear Father:

Tekakwitha is becoming a popular model and patron—in response to your appeal for funds to carry on the Cause of Kateri Tekakwitha, you find herein enclosed a donation. This is made by our Parish Unit of Catholic Youth, composed of young girls. They took her already as their model and pray for the Canonization of Kateri at their every meeting.

—Leo J. Post, Pastor.

Still another: "Permit me to introduce myself as the chairman of a group of girls in our Young Ladies' Sodality of St. Patrick's Church having Catherine Tekakwitha as our guide and inspiration. We are called the Tekakwithans and our membership consists of the girls in our Sodality who are in their junior, sophomore and senior years in high school."

—Janesville, Wis.

In our next number we shall list forty such groups; and we do not know them all.

"Enclosed is the offering which I promised some time ago in thanksgiving for my health being restored."

—Ardmore, Pa.

"Having been out of work for several months and a great deal depending on me as I have three children to support, I now give thanks to Tekakwitha." —Philadelphia, Pa.

"I promised to write and give a little offering, if Catherine would see that I passed in all my school exams. She granted my intention. I am thirteen." —Bordentown, N. J.

"I promised to distribute leaflets if she obtained my request. I was praying for \$1,000 and from a very unforeseen source I obtained \$1,004.55."

—Cleveland, O.

". . . In fulfillment of our promise to her should she obtain a reduction of our interest rate."

—Regina, Sask.

"On September 26 Miss W. crushed her hand to the wrist in a washing machine-wringer. The whole hand was a pulpy mass, swollen, distorted and discolored, but no bones actually broken. It was feared gangrene might set in because the veins were damaged so badly and the hand was turning dark. On the following Thursday the relic of Kateri was placed on the injured hand and a novena in her honor made. The hand is entirely well now, there is no stiffness and it can be used as freely as the other."

—M. W., Jamaica Plain, Mass.

"A Sister of our Order was told by a specialist that 'she had an extensive cancer on

the side of her forehead over the eye.' He gave her radium treatments and was surprised at her cure. The Sister is now seventy and at that time was in her sixty-ninth year. As soon as the specialist made the statement about Sister's trouble, she and I promised, besides publication, to write and stage a drama depicting the life of Kateri Tekakwitha. We fulfilled our promise (the drama) at once and urged Sisters in other schools where our Sisters teach to present plays about Tekakwitha. We wrote plays for three schools having episodes from her life and they were most successful."

"On August 14 I bought a piece of land from the Government at a model land settlement they are developing. I also wanted an adjoining piece, but they refused to sell it to me. . . . Six months passed and I heard nothing. One day last month I got a postal card from a Catholic lady: 'See me tomorrow concerning land. Important.' The next day I went to see the writer of the card. Her mother, a non-Catholic, had been offered the piece I wanted. She had decided not to take it and wanted to give the preference to me. The next day I journeyed to Kingston, got the Bishop's approval and an hour later I had completed the purchase and had the receipt in my pocket. It was Kateri who did it, dear Father. The Bishop came out to see the purchase and he could hardly believe his eyes. 'How did you ever do it?' he queried. I told him it was Kateri."

—James M. Harney, S.J.,
Linstead, Jamaica, B. W. I.

Life, by Wynne, 64 pages, 3 illustrations, containing in detail reports of remarkable favors. . . . 12c. a copy

Leaflets. 5c. each; 25c. a doz.; \$1.50 a 100

Tekakwitha Novena Leaflets. . . . 5c. each; 25c. a doz.

Medals. Oxid. silver, 15c.; aluminum, 50c. a doz.

(Prices include postage)

Pictures, colored 13 x 10 in., 40c.

Pictures, colored, silk applied to her relics, 5 x 3 in., 5c.

Image of Kateri in wood admixed with oak growing where and when she was born, Auriesville, 1656. . . . 5 3/4 x 3 3/4 in., 40c. each

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