

THE LILY OF

Fairest flower that ever



THE MOHAWKS

bloomed among true men

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THE MARVELOUS MAID OF AURIESVILLE*

By RICARDO FERNANDEZ, S.J.

(Continued)

Baptism

The year is now 1670. After many heart and back-breaking vicissitudes the missionaries have set up a permanent mission at Caughnawaga. Two missionaries preceded Father James de Lamberville, S.J., at this station. These failed to notice Katharine for two reasons. The *Lily of the Mohawks*, by no means the pushing type, was excessively timid. And her uncle, having ground his axe, was once more openly opposing the missionaries. For five years Katharine nursed her desires and worshipped from afar at the public instructions.

In the fall of 1675, however, an external grace brought her in direct contact with Father de Lamberville, whose name is too little known as a pioneer of American Catholicism. While most of the village were busy harvesting, Katharine was confined to her lodge with a sore foot. The missionary happened along and, the time being full, Katharine made bold to reveal all her difficulties and hopes and desires.

Thenceforward, all technical problems were swept aside. She became a faithful attendant at the regular catechetical instruction. After long years of training in Jesuit asceticism Father de Lamberville would know how to recognize a favored soul. He gave her special instructions; progress was swift as the skilled director unfolded the mysteries of our faith to the virginal and hungry soul of Tekakwitha. His discreet inquiries discovered no chinks in the girl's spiritual armor.

Indians were baptized with great caution by the missionaries, who usually insisted on a two-year period of probation. It took a stout soul to keep the faith in the Mohawk villages. They were teeming with temptation. The stakes were high and the Fathers could not lightly jeopardize their efforts by making Christians out of men and women who would not persevere. Their missionary venture received a body-blow at each apostasy. In line with this wise policy Katharine was trained and tried until the following Easter of 1676 when prudence had been fully exercised. At the age of twenty Katharine, whose path to the Church had been so devious and thorny, became a Catholic in the strict sense.

The sacrament was conferred with great solemnity in a woodland chapel richly decorated with furs trapped during the winter and with the flowers which brighten the valley. The Indians delighted in pageantry. They made no secret that day of their admiration for Katharine's virtue. It was a sort of Thabor for the Servant of God and Father de Lamberville.

*Note: This story is published—Courtesy of the *The Pilgrim*, The Voice of Ossernenon (now Auriesville, N. Y.), where Kateri was born.

This hour of glory and peace passed quickly. Her virtuous actions which before had been considered merely queer were now tagged Christian, opprobriously so. Virtue, though it tend to its own business, has a way of antagonizing sinners. And sinners were not wanting along the Mohawk to plague Katharine for fair. They called her derisively "The Christian." They taunted her as lazy for keeping the Sabbath. Jeers, starvation, threats of bodily violence she met with resignation and patience. No stone was too small to hurl at her, no accusation too base. Her aunt accused her of sinning with her uncle. Thorough investigation by Father de Lamberville revealed the charge to be crass calumny.

Onsigongo is Foiled

The priest had no fears for Katharine's constancy, but with a solution at hand he thought it pointless to subject her to such bitter trials. Accordingly, he made plans to spirit her away to a completely Christian atmosphere, the mission at Laprairie in Canada. From the first time she heard of this peaceful spot Katharine had yearned to fly there from her riotous surroundings.

The actual departure was taken stealthily. Katharine's uncle, as soon as he became aware of it, started in hot and furious pursuit. His gun had three bullets. Onsigongo was not the man to miss. But miss he did. His targets, Katharine and two other Christians, had outwitted and outdistanced him. Unsuccessful, he returned to Caughnawaga.

He must surely have died of apoplexy had he known that her escape had been made easier by a North-American *Richard the Lionhearted* known, not without reason, as *Hot Powder*. He had given his canoe to the fugitives. *Hot Powder*, sometimes called *Hot Ashes*, was an Oneida chief, a redoubtable warrior, and, after his conversion, an ardent apostle, somewhat in the militant Irish tradition.

His strength, skill and sagacity had earned him a post of honor in the tribe and, once a Catholic, they won many a vacillating savage to the faith. If he was still in the village when Katharine's uncle returned, his flat-faced solicitude over the loss must have been a delight to behold. *Hot Powder* could practice innocent deceit and *nobody*, not even Onsigongo, bullied him.

Perfection and Pain

The story of Katharine at Laprairie is one of a soul in earnest pursuit of perfection. The spiritual routine at the mission was geared to the ordinarily devout. Into this she plunged with marked fervor and fidelity. Her advance in sanctity was rapid.

Unshod in winter as well as summer, she walked to Church at four o'clock in the morning. Each day she assisted at two Masses. She was permitted to receive her first Holy Communion the Christmas day after her arrival without the ordinary year of preparation. She communicated as often as possible and made spiritual communions throughout the day.

The joy with which she witnessed the solemn ceremonies of Holy Week for the first and last time in her life may readily be imagined. Good Friday fired her with a burning desire to perform still greater penances. And on Easter Sunday she was accorded the distinction of being admitted to the Confraternity of the Holy Family. This was an organization normally composed of the older tried and true Indians. The more people esteemed her the less worthy she considered herself. Self-love was all but dead.

She had come with the highest recommendations. In the letter she carried from Father de Lamberville he had written to Father Cholenec: "*You will soon know what a treasure we have sent you! Guard it well! May it profit in your hands, for the glory of God and the salvation of a soul that is certainly very dear to Him.*"

Katharine lived in the cabin of her brother-in-law, as she called him, a good and kindly man. Also living there was Anastasie Teonhatsiongo, a matron, who was a tremendous power for good in the village. She had befriended Katharine at Ossernenon and at Laprairie acted as her spiritual directress. According to her lights and limited knowledge, Anastasie was an excellent adviser.

She was responsible in large part for a lively penitential spirit among the Catholic Indians. She discoursed frequently on Hell and the penances practiced by the early Christians. Like the little girl who "when she was good was very, very good and when she was bad she was horrid" the fervent Indians practiced severe austerities. Katharine outdid them all.

She worked tirelessly, fasted prodigiously, slept little, wielded the scourge on her innocent flesh. Often she tormented her body with an iron girdle; she placed hot coals between her toes, said her beads barefoot in the snow. But pride had no place in her penances. She was positively artful in concealing them. Father Cholenec discovered them with difficulty and only his prudence kept her generosity within bounds.

(To be continued)

OUT OF THE ORDINARY

AN ANSWER TO PRAYER

"About three and one-half years ago I broke my wrist and, although I was unaware of it, the bone had been set improperly, until January, 1948, when a small lump appeared just where the bone had been broken. It caused me considerable pain, which was aggravated by my work (am a telephone operator), until finally Easter Saturday I went to the doctor. He took several X-rays that day and when I returned for more X-rays in another week, the bones had disintegrated and it was necessary to have a bone removed from the pelvis at the hip and grafted into the wrist. I spent a month in the hospital and after another four months at home, I was able to return to work. They decided I should take a series of radar treatments, hoping that this would heal the 'soft' spot. When I had another X-ray taken after these treatments it showed not what they had expected and another operation was advised this February. At that time my aunt was not expected to live and I did not wish to upset her, so told them I would when she died, which she did on March 5. On March 16, one of the girls at the Queens Daughters Home where I live gave me a leaflet about Kateri Tekakwitha. I immediately started the novena, and on Thursday of last week I decided to have another X-ray. I had placed the relic on my wrist with adhesive tape during the nine days; Friday I had the X-ray and yesterday I got the verdict! The operation is

not to be performed and may never, my doctor informs me. It seems strange to me that this should have taken place the very day I had ended my novena. I feel as though through her intercession I have been helped. They were going to remove a bone in my leg this time and 'plant' it in my wrist."

—St. Louis, Mo.

KATERI AT WORK

"The relic has been quite 'active' since its arrival. More than sixty persons have venerated it. One of the first to do so was a lady who had just finished making a novena to Tekakwitha in which she asked to avoid an operation. Before her novena was ended she thought she felt better and canceled all arrangements for the operation. Last Sunday morning we gave her the relic to venerate. The next day she consulted another doctor who assured her that an operation was not necessary. However the lady really feels that the inspiration to consult the second physician was in response to her novena to Venerable Tekakwitha." —Pawhuska, Okla.

"About two weeks ago I wrote to ask the prayers of Tekakwitha for my sister-in-law. When I wrote you we were very upset. My sister-in-law's trouble was a nervous condition which was growing more serious by the hour. It seemed impossible that we could even get her to the doctor or into a hospital as it was a mental depression—you can imagine our problem. Thank God and through

the prayers of Tekakwitha, we did get her to the doctor and hospital and it is like a miracle to see so much improvement in such a short time."

—Essex, Md.

"Knowing your interest in Venerable Kateri's response to any devotion to her, I wish to go on record in stating the great help she extended me in undergoing a very recent painful operation. Believe me, without Venerable Kateri's assistance I should never have had the courage and fortitude to go through the ordeal."

—Chicago, Ill.

"Just another little note to express my thanks to our Kateri Tekakwitha, who has helped me so many little times when things seemed quite impossible. Kateri has been a great source of comfort for me in trying instances and has always heard a hurried prayer. I am very grateful."

—New Orleans, La.

"On our journey home from the west coast last week, we encountered terrible weather of sleet, ice and snow. I prayed for guidance for my sister as she was driving and for our safety, which was heard and granted. I'm making a novena of thanksgiving to Kateri, and will encourage others in their devotion to her."

—Park Ridge, Ill.

"Venerable Tekakwitha has been very good to me in helping to get work whenever I need it badly."

—Indianapolis, Ind.

"This letter is to fulfill a promise I made to Catherine Tekakwitha. I prayed to her that through her intercession I would receive a favorable report after a recent operation. I was granted this request and wish to publicize the fact."

—St. Louis, Mo.

"My son found a job, was married in a Catholic church though half in favor of a court marriage, and also got an apartment, for which I am most grateful to Venerable Kateri, and I would like some leaflets to distribute."

—Chicago, Ill.

"I want to thank you for your prayers. My operation was a complete success and the doctors were pleased with me. My physical condition was good at the time, but I know that prayers helped me most of all."

—New York, N. Y.

"Just a small donation in thanksgiving for a safe delivery. I am trusting in her help through other difficulties, and feel confident she will help me, as she has before."

—Baltimore, Md.

ADDITIONAL FAVORS

Cures	3	Employment	2
Financial Aid	5	Not Specified	43

PETITIONS

Cures	7	Apartments	4
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Obituary

Miss Ellen T. Kelly, Worcester, Mass.

Mrs. Gladys Marie Palermo, New Orleans, La.

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