

THE LILY OF

Fairest flower that ever



THE MOHAWKS

bloomed among true men

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TEKAKWITHA'S LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH

(Continued)

There then existed a very strange custom at the Mission. The Blessed Sacrament was never taken to the sick person's cabin. Instead, they laid the patient on a bark stretcher, and, at the risk of seeing him die on the way, brought him to the church, there to receive Holy Communion.

When the question of the Viaticum for Catherine arose, the Fathers hesitated; she was certainly far too feeble to be taken to the church. Should they then discontinue the custom, or let the patient die without this supreme consolation? The missionaries decided to make an exception to the general rule, and the whole village approved their decision; such an exception was justified with respect to so saintly a person.

The sick girl called to her aid what remaining strength she had, to receive worthily for the last time her Saviour whom she so dearly loved. A small material detail troubled her; she confided to her faithful companion that on account of her poverty she had

no suitable covering. Mary Teresa brought her at once what was required.

The rumor spread through the village that the Blessed Sacrament was to be taken into Catherine Tekakwitha's cabin. Everyone wanted to be present at this unusual event. The crowd accompanied the priest out of reverence for Our Lord, and also, as they told one another, that they might see a saint die.

After the general absolution, she received with the greatest devotion "the Viaticum of the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Her thanksgiving was, so to speak, a hymn of gratitude to God in the rehearsal of the principal facts of her life, particularly since her baptism, and her coming to the Mission.

Many persons wanted to ask her to pray for them. Father Cholenec requested her to receive them, and to give them a few words of advice. She very willingly complied. And then all day long it was a continual coming and going of persons near her mat. And be-

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tween these acts of charity to her neighbor, she made frequents acts of the love of God.

When evening came, they prepared to sit up with the dying girl during the night. It was customary for the members of the Holy Family Society to take it in turn, two by two, to sit up with those sick persons who were in danger of death.

The missionary selected two of the most fervent associates of the Holy Family Confraternity. One, the youngest member of the association, was much liked by Catherine for her profound piety. After night prayers, this girl asked the Father's permission to go to the borders of the forest, there to do penance, that she might obtain the grace of a good death for the patient. She spent a quarter of an hour there scourging herself till her shoulders bled.

The sick woman on her mat knew of this at once. Turning to the other watcher, she begged her to go and fetch her companion, which she did immediately. The two soon re-entered the cabin. Catherine in a whisper told the younger of the two to let her companion take her rest first, as she wanted to say something to her in private. She then encouraged and counseled her to persevere in God's service, told her she would pray for her in Heaven, and concluded by assuring the girl that Our Lord was very pleased with her. As the girl was as humble as she was fervent, she demurred at this, saying that she was sinful, and that Catherine did not really know her; the sick girl then took hold of her arm, and pressing it, said:

"I am well aware, my sister, of what I am saying. I know where you have been, and what you have been doing there; go, take courage, for you are certainly very pleasing to God, and I shall help you when I am with Him."

The next day was Wednesday in Holy Week, the eve of the two days devoted to the two great mysteries of the Eucharist and the

Cross, both special devotions of the dying girl.

This was to be her last day on earth. One of the missionaries had had a presentiment of this. Here is Father Cholenec's account:

"Indeed I still remember that at the time she entered upon her last illness, more than two months before her death, one of our Fathers was for this reason sure that God would take her from this world on this very day, so that she might celebrate in Heaven the two great Feasts to which she had been most devoted on earth."

Catherine had herself apparently foreseen the day of her death. On the preceding night, after her reception of Holy Viaticum, they hastened to bestow the Extreme Unction. She told the Father it was not urgent and that he could postpone the rite till the next day; so he waited. On Wednesday morning she received this Sacrament with admirable piety and resignation.

Even the hour of her death seems to have been known to our holy Indian girl.

Amongst the members of the Holy Family Association, Catherine had formed "a little pious confraternity" which was still known ten years later as the "Sisters of Catherine." The fervent Mary Teresa, who had had a long conversation with Catherine on the eve of her death, was one of the members.

They all wanted to be present at the death of their "Sister." This was difficult, as it seemed probable that the sick girl would die during the morning and they were obliged to go out and gather wood for the feast-days.

In their uncertainty, they decided that the best thing to do was to ask Catherine herself, since doubtless she had sufficient influence in Heaven to obtain the postponement of her death until their return from the forest. Father Cholenec spoke to her in their behalf. She at once said that her sisters might go for their wood and that they would return in time to be present at her death.

She kept her word. When the women came back at three o'clock in the afternoon, she was still alive and waiting for them. This is how Father Cholenec concludes this incident: "She waited," he writes, "until they had entered her cabin, and the wonder which I witnessed with my own eyes, is that no sooner had the last person come in, and all were kneeling around her, than her last agony began. Thus everyone had the consolation of seeing her die as they had desired and as she had promised."

At three o'clock her agony began, "the most gentle agony in the world." A little later, she lost the power of speech while uttering the names of Jesus and Mary. She could still hear very well, her two biographers remark, and was fully conscious. It was evident that she was trying to make, at least interiorly, the acts suggested to her. At last, about half-past-three, she peacefully expired, just as if she had gone quietly to sleep.

This was on Wednesday in Holy Week, 17 April, 1680. Catherine Tekakwitha was in her twenty-fourth year. Father Olivaint, S.J., martyr of the Commune, was fond of repeating that "it needs less time than courage to become a saint."

A quarter of an hour after Catherine's death, a change took place in her which was a cause of great astonishment to the missionaries and everyone in the village.

Father Cholenec himself will tell us about this astounding event:

"At four years of age," he says, "Catherine's face had been pitted with small-pox; her infirmities and mortifications had also helped to disfigure her. But this face, so very swarthy and emaciated, changed suddenly about a quarter of an hour after her death, and became in a moment so fair and beautiful that, noticing the change (for I was praying beside her), I cried out in surprise and called the Father who was working

on the Repository for Maundy Thursday. He and all the Indians came in a hurry on hearing of this miracle, which we were able to contemplate until she was buried."

The priest thus hastily summoned was Father Chauchetière. He was quite as astonished as his colleague. "It was," he said, "a further argument for belief which God had granted to the Indians to help them appreciate the Faith."

Father Cholenec adds that on Thursday morning two Frenchmen living at the Prairie de la Magdeleine came to the Sault to assist at the services. They had to pass before the half-open door of the deceased Catherine. Seeing her there on her mat, with so lovely and smiling a face, they said to each other: "How peacefully that young woman is sleeping!"

But having learned a little later it was Catherine herself who had died the previous night, they returned to the cabin, and kneeling down recommended themselves to her prayers. They were so touched at what they saw that they at once asked to be allowed to make the coffin that was to receive so precious a relic.

Father Cholenec aptly concludes his narrative by this reflection: "I frankly own that my first idea then was that Catherine had that moment entered Heaven, and was shedding in advance a little of that glory of which her soul had just gained eternal possession."

Who will not agree with these sentiments on recalling the virtues of our saintly Iroquois?

The lily of purity had for a moment drooped its head under the icy blast of death. A moment later the revivifying breath of the Holy Ghost made it rise again in all its beauty, even more beautiful and fragrant than ever; a probable foreshadowing of the glory it was then enjoying in the garden of Heaven.

HEALTH RESTORED

"Please accept my donation in thanksgiving for a favor received. My baby was very sick from the day she was born; it was that R.H. factor, and she wasn't expected to live. Then while she was in the hospital she caught pneumonia. My sister, Sister Tekakwitha, gave me the relic of Kateri to apply to her and I also made the novena. From the day I started to make the novena she began to improve. In six weeks we brought her home perfectly well, thanks to Tekakwitha."

—Camden, N. J.

KATERI'S EYES WERE AFFECTED

"I wish to express the deep appreciation of our family to little Kateri Tekakwitha for her great helpfulness in connection with aiding in the miraculous cure of the virus eye infection of my brother. About a month ago his eye became very blurred, his vision disappeared and there was an immense amount of pus in the back of his eye. The day following the placing on his eye of the first-class relic of Tekakwitha and starting the novena a great improvement was noted and his doctor also admitted that his recovery was amazing and nothing short of a miracle. His wife replied, 'Do you mind, doctor, if we give a little Indian girl, whom we hope will be canonized, the credit for this cure because there never was so great an improvement until the relic was applied!' We are all most deeply grateful.

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"At this same time I also wish to tell you that my same brother's wife, who had been suffering from great pains and inflammation in her abdomen, after applying little Kateri's relic, noticed immediate disappearance of pain and inflammation. She happens to be a convert and is so deeply thankful for Kateri's help, for both herself and husband, that she has asked me to obtain for her some leaflets in order to help spread devotion to the Cause of Tekakwitha." —Cleveland Heights, O.

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Employment	7	Spiritual	3
Financial Aid	15	Successful Operation	5
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Obituary

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Rev. Thomas A. Doyle, S.J., New York, N. Y.
Rev. L. R. Harding, Roscoe, S. D.
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