

## AHATSISTARI A WAR HERO AND SAINTLY MARTYR.

.....

On Eastersunday, 1642, the small mission church of Fort Ste. Marie set to its best, as to decoration was overflowing with devout worshippers ~~who were~~ ~~and~~ likewise exultant with joy over the glorious resurrection of Our Lord Jesus from the grave. It was holding a solemn Divine Service at which one hundred and twenty newly made Christians from the preceding day, were admitted to the Sacred Banquet of the Lord for the first time in their lives, making thus their First Holy Communion coincide with their first Easter duty. That was at the epoch of glorious achievement in the field of apostolate amongst the Hurons'.

But the great pity for this worthy indian nation is that this happy and prosperous period of its religious history had been so soon a fact of the past. It came to a most lamentable end a few years later in 1649, the year of its complete collapse as a nation, brought about by the fate of a most sanguinary war.....

Among this representative group of neophytes of that Easter-Sunday just mentionned--worthy disciples of such Apostles as de Brebeuf, Daniel, Lalement.etc...the most conspicuous of all was Ahatsistari, nicknamed Eustache at his baptism...the Hero of this narrative...

Ahatsistari, by his warring exploits previous to his baptism had gained for himself a legendary fame, and now <sup>as a christian he was</sup> after "his" baptism "he"

was, during the short time <sup>was afterward</sup> ~~he~~ given to live, to illustrate himself by a singular ardor in the service of God, by his devotedness to the Missionaries and his fearless attitude under the fires of the Iroquois, in which he expired with all the saintly dispositions of a true martyr of Christ.



~~saintly dispositions of a real martyr.~~

The Relation of the time says of him: "Son courage et les exploits ~~qu'il~~ accomplit tous les ans le font passer pour le plus grand guerrier qui soit dans tout le pays."

The description that follows of two of his many gallant deeds in war shall suffice to give an idea of his valour as a warrior...

"Less than one year ago", says the Relation of the time, "while in campaign, hazard placed him in confrontation with an army of three hundred Iroquois. He fought them with only fifty men under his command. As soon as Ahatsistari began to shoot, the Iroquois warriors took to flight, seized with fright, as if the arrows coming forth from the Huron chief's bow had been so many ignite shafts hitting them, such were their swiftness and directness. Those who persisted in resisting, gained but being caught as prisoners by the vanquishing hero who brought them in bonds to his country..."

Later in the same summer season while in a cruise on the big lake that lies between his country and that of the Iroquois, (Lake Ontario) as the cronicle of the time gives it--our warrior happened to sight a large fleet of iroquois canoes actually in full speed toward him. His companions' first thought was for the flight and would have been quick to it too, but electrified by their Chief who then cried to ~~them~~ them: "not so! camarads, not so!....Lets go straight to them".

As quick as told, they executed the command. The moment they were ready for the hand to hand fight, Ahatsistary, was by a marterly jumping feat into the Iroquois chief's canoe which he had marked by the size and equipment...Then the first man he reached had his scalp splitten by a stroke of his axe, and right after two more men of the same canoe were precipated into the Lake by a sheer swing of his right arm.



A moment after ~~he~~ <sup>was</sup> himself ~~is~~ seen floundering in the liquid element with the rest of the occupants whom he had carried down there behind him, by causing the boat to capsize--now swimming with one hand, he strikes and massacres with the other all those within reach.

The other canoes amazed at that unsuspected display of such a herculean valor, the like of which they had never witnessed, seeing themselves vanquished by anticipation sought <sup>to</sup> in a rapid fugitive course <sup>to</sup> a place of security in the far distance against that superhuman <sup>strength.</sup> force.

Meanwhile, our hero returned to his own canoe and started for those who were still in the Lake and <sup>struggling desperately for life.</sup> at a loss with their involuntary bath, <sup>them</sup> whom, <sup>them or</sup> after rescuing he brought prisoners in his country--~~to dispose of them as such...~~

#### -HIS CONVERSION-

This man, Ahatsistari, was born a warrior. War was for him like the breath of his soul, as also his whole life had been a series of combats.

But a thing worthy of note in this famous barbarian was that his warring humor instead of interfering with his becoming a Christian <sup>help in bringing about</sup> did but ~~hasten~~ <sup>hasten</sup> his conversion, as we shall see by the following account.

This Huron warrior, worthy of the antique Heros of Rome and Carthage,--it must be remarked, was subjected to a long period of probation before <sup>being admitted</sup> ~~admission~~ to Baptism...not that he ever was inwardly adverse to the Christian Faith, since he took from the beginning a real concern in the true Religion--such concern as to prompt him to apply for Baptism ~~as~~ right then and maintained ~~his~~ attitude without faltering, none the less the Missionaries were barring him from the ritualistic entry of the Church. They differed his Baptism because of certain pagan practices of an idolatric nature to which he adhered and would not readily give up, although otherwise affording in his moral conduct nothing why he should not be accepted as a fit candidate to Baptism. At last after years of patient expectation ~~duely terminated by a course of instructions as a~~ crowning to his information previously acquired, ~~crowning~~ that last ~~the~~ whole winter, during which



preparation, ~~during which~~ the aspirant's renunciation having been satisfactorily demonstrated, Ahatsistari was then allowed to present himself with the other Catechumens at the Mission Ste Marie for a final test. Accordingly, on the day appointed, was he seen at the mission amongst the other aspirants. His answers to the questions proved satisfactory since he came out with a favorable judgment ~~as~~ <sup>test</sup> in favor to his admission to the Sacrament to be administered two days hence--on Holy Saturday.

Before proceeding any farther with our Hero, let us take heed of what was revealed of his past life as a result of his examination. Incidentally with other questions the Priest <sup>enquired of</sup> ~~interrogated~~ him as to his inner feelings relatively to the Sacrament of Baptism. Our conspicuous catechumen answered to the Father in a way that although typical, was a true revelation of his soul and at the same time a convincing plea in favor of his admission to the sacrament of Regeneration.

"I have the Faith deeply set to the bottom of my heart," he said to the Father, "my demeanor during the whole winter is a sufficient guarantee of the <sup>veracity</sup> ~~verity~~ of my world. In a few days I must start again for the war; now if I happen to be killed during the combat, while still a pagan, where shall my soul go?"

"If you could see through my heart as clearly as does the Master of our lives you would have already made me a Christian a long time and so the fear of hell would not be haunting me all the time, but specially when by affronting the enemy, I expose myself to death. What shall I do then if you do not baptize me? I cannot baptize myself. All I can do is to declare sincerely to you how I yearn to become a Christian, and after that if my soul happens to fall into the hands of the devil for dying unbaptized the fault shall be onto you. Anyway, I shall never



stop praying to God now that I know Him, Perhaps He will have mercy on me, since He is, as you say, so kindly disposed toward men, even more still than "the Blackrobe..."

"How and when did you PICK UP your first thought of embracing the Faith in some future time in your life?" asked the Father?

"Long ago, even before the coming of the Blackrobes ~~amongst us~~", the answer was, "I have been many times preserved from peril wherein most of my ~~camarades~~ <sup>comrades</sup> perished...I knew very well, it was not by myself if I were thus rescued from danger; my inner conscience was telling me that a certain Genius more powerful than any of those who are familiar to my compatriots, and whom I knew not, was assisting me with his saving succour."

"While the Hurons were attributing all their good luck to their dreams, on my part I was convinced that all their fanciful theories were but senseless aberrations--I knew nought else beyond that.

"But the moment I heard of the great God that, ye, Black-Robes, are preaching and what that Jesus Christ had done on earth, I recognized Him and resolved to acknowledge Him all my life. Going to war, morning and night, I recommended myself to Him. From Him, I am sure, came all my victories.. In Him I believe. In His Name I ask of you to baptize me, so that after my death this Jesus might be merciful toward me onto salvation."

After such a plea it would have been criminal to afflict with a refusal such a heavenly marked soul, and the Father either could by no means think of denying him ~~the yearned for favor~~ any longer. *a favor so ~~yearned~~ <sup>desire</sup> desired.*

Our hero was baptized very few days after if not even on the following <sup>day</sup>, on Holy Saturday, together with that substantial batch of Hurons, as described in the beginning, making together their first Holy Communion on the Easter Sunday <sup>that</sup> following their baptism.



~~Eustache was the name given him when first called by the officiating priest on pouring on his forehead the Baptismal Water that made him a Christian at the Baptismal ceremony. He made his first Holy Communion on the following day--that Easter Sunday also mentioned above.~~

In the same week, our neophyte Eustache (name given him at his baptism) was already starting with a few other Huron braves, military<sup>ly</sup> equipped, to join groups already gone ahead on the war-path...

#### AHATSISTARI'S CAPTURE AND DEATH.

On the thirteenth of June of the year 1642, a flotilla of twelve canoes mounted by forty sturdy Hurons, was pulling off on the small river running at the foot of Fort Ste Marie, en-route to Quebec. The voyage, especially at that time was beset with dangers, greatly exposed to eventual attacks by the lurking Iroquois always in readiness from their lairs to open fire on travellers.

Nothing but extreme necessity could motivate a voyage in such circumstances. The Missionaries were in dire need of new supplies. For two consecutive years already, in consequence of that hateful state of hostilities, all communications had been cut off with Quebec which was then the unique provisioning base for all the Indian Missions in this part of the country...notwithstanding that, as they were so hard pressed, over there, they had to go. Accordingly the crew was a <sup>selection</sup> choice of Christian Hurons taken <sup>from</sup> ~~from~~ among the bravest; those who volunteered were ready to sacrifice even their lives for the success of the undertaking. In definitive the whole flotilla was placed under the captainship of our neophyte Eustache Ahatsistari as the best reputed <sup>of all</sup> ~~of all~~ in every <sup>among all</sup> ~~regard~~ <sup>respect</sup>, and mainly for his bravery and military hability.



Jogues was the one missionary Priest chosen to accompany the travelers, being sent by the Superior of the Huron Missions to act in his name at Quebec, and negotiate down there the affairs of the Missions.

They succeeded in their way down to reach Quebec without having to record any incident with the enemy.

After fifteen days of business transactions, the flotilla was on its way back laden with supplies mostly for the Missionaries. The party was cheerful, counting <sup>upon</sup> in their devout confidence <sup>upon</sup> the same heavenly protection for a happy return to their country.

The travellers had ascended the St. Lawrence up to Three Rivers, (ninety miles above Quebec) and even passed that town for thirty miles when they were surprised by an ambushed party of Iroquois waiting for them. Under their sudden volley of deadly shots..., Confusion first set in amongst the Huron travelers, and then rout followed soon after.

The few braves only who afforded resistance in the panic could by no means sustain the shock; the disaster was complete as an effect of the suddenness and violence of the onslaught, ...the result most lamentable...

Apart <sup>from</sup> those who escaped by running away through the woods, all fell into the hands of the attackers who made them war captives.. Twenty out of forty were involved in the same calamity and in face of the same awful fate.. ~~(all possible victims after partial tortures of slow fire at the stake.)~~

Among those captives, to mention a few names, the most conspicuous was the Jesuit Jogues, After him came René Goupil (a Donné) volunteer domestic who was <sup>in</sup> his captivity <sup>won</sup> the crown of sainthood in dying a martyr at the hands of the Iroquois. In third place let us name he with whom we are primarily interested, our Hero, the vallient Ahatsistari... All these forming with their companions a group destined to worst possible fate on earth at the hands of their captors. They were tightly bound as war captives and as such, immediately subjected to tortures inflicted by which hainous and vindicative savage masters set loose against them...(I) used to afflict their victims with after holding them and right on the way One can read in St. Jogues' life all the details of the horrible tortures Saint Jogues and his party had to suffer on the way to the Iroquois.



~~tortures they were subjected to on their way to the Iroquois country,  
and on their arrival to each of the three Mohawk villages.....~~

### THE MARTYR.

In this momentous circumstance and fierce encounter just described, it would seem that Ahatsistari's <sup>war</sup> star had grown dim, even altogether eclipsed since He was then for once defeated, and by his capture reduced now to a complete disability.

Events under the firmament of the heavens have sometimes strange and incomprehensible turns. A man's destiny is quickly changed and for the saintly individual it is always for his better good or superior advantage even if apparently or according to the visible world they spell catastrophe, humiliation, ~~and~~ sufferings, miseries, etc. It was so for our hero.

The great God of Heaven who Had presided over his military success since his youth has equally presided his defeat for his greater glorification--i. e. to place him under another guiding star of a more substantial lustre...to make him shine henceforward as a Christian Hero and as a wonder to to all by his superhuman endurance, humility and firm<sup>ness</sup> in the abyss of woes wherein his hellish foes have now plunged him.

First, let it be said for Ahatsistari's lasting military reputation that his bravery was the cause of his capture. As he had been the first on the defence and the most advanced to the front, so has he been the first to be caught.



Let us quote what his holy companion and Father in Christ, Jogues, wrote of him in this connection.

"At last they brought to shore this brave Christian captain named Eustache Ahatsistari, ~~Enfin on amena ce brave capitaine chretien, Eustache;~~ who as he saw me, exclaimed; "~~lequel m'ayant appe-~~ ~~ren s'ecria;~~ AH!. mon Père, je vous avais juré que je vivrais ou me- ~~urrais avec vous.~~ (I had sworn unto you that I would ~~sustain the~~ ~~live~~ or die with you."

"This sight," continues the Holy Missionary, "transpierced my heart. I spoke a few words to him, but I do not remember what I told him then."

"Among all our Huron captives," always according to Jogues, "the most illustrious, was the valiant Eustache."

As an excess of tortures above those exercised against the others (as described above) he, (Eustache) had both his thumbs cut off, and the dolorous amputation finished, had a sharp reed introduced into the ghastly cuts and <sup>to tear</sup> made ~~made~~ through the fibers and nerves of his forearms up to elbows.

The Holy Jesuit seeing such cruelty could not withhold his <sup>++</sup> ~~tor-~~ <sup>+</sup> ~~tures~~ might interpret these tears in the eyes of his good Master as an effect of fear for himself, forgetful of his own tortures, he told them in defense of the Jesuit's reputation that the tears that were filling his eyes emerged from his heart through sympathy for him as their unique cause, not at all drawn from any ~~feeling~~ <sup>feeling</sup> of fear. "For," as he said, "You can bear testimony that you have never seen him cry or weep in his tortures, nor his face lose any thing of <sup>it</sup> ~~th~~ his serenity."

<sup>++</sup> tears that were rolling down his cheeks from his flooded eyes, ~~so~~ <sup>so</sup> great was his compassion for the sufferer.

Upon noticing the fact, the heroic patient, fearing that his



Upon this, the future saint and Martyr replied to his dearest friend and disciple: "In fact, although my sufferings are immense, they are not so painful to my body as thine pitiful condition is to my heart....Courage! deareast friend, He to whose eyes nothing pass<sup>es</sup> unnoticed shall know how to reward <sup>hereafter, that</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>all</sup> thou art suffering now on earth for his love."

"I am keeping memory of these many fortifying truths of our holy religion, replied Eustache," it is why I will stand firm onto death."

In fact, his constancy has been always admirable, and his endurance superhuman, (Relation 1647, Page 48, 49.)

The day prior to their capture, while at Three Rivers, as if moved by an inner pr~~o~~monition of the tragical fate that was awaiting them, the whole Huron squad agreed in having a fraternal reunion, a kind of revival meeting in which, after going to confession, they exhorted themselves mutually in the Lord, in order to dispose their souls to meet bravely with any fate or calamity that might befall them on their long journey homeward.

The way these good Hurons acted in the circumstance remind one of an assembly of early Christians placed in face of their persecutors, exhorting each other to martyrdom.

"Let us remember, dearest friends," broke out one of the most commendable for his age and virtue, "We did not embrace the Faith to be preserved of all evils on earth....., but to save our souls and to be happy up above in Heaven...and <sup>he</sup> continued on that stirring theme up to the end of his harangue, after which they all swore fidelity to God. Then they started, each at a turn, to speak out his own fervorino... down the rigor of his pains."



Soon it was Ahatsistari<sup>to</sup> to speak; "Could it be". He began, "that any of us ever happened to give up believing in God, were he even to suffer burn<sup>ts</sup> unto death at the hands of our enemies! As for me,

"If I ever happen to fall into the hands of the Iroquois, I cannot expect to escape alive, but before they put me to death, I shall ask them: What do those Pale-faces (meaning the Hollanders) who are coming from beyond the seas into your country bring you all the time, gunshot powder, knives and the like.

Yes, I shall tell them, these pale-faces, do not love you, for they withhold from you the most precious of all merchandises which the French give us without selling in announcing to us an Eternal life... A god who made the universe, a fire down below prepared for all those as would not honor him... a place of happiness in heaven, an everlasting abode of our immortal souls and our bodies that shall arise impassible on the great Resurrection Day. After that I shall also tell them that on these <sup>eternal</sup> truths is laid the object of my consolation and perseverance. They may then let loose against my body all the instruments of their cruelty, they shall be able to drain my life with my blood from my body, but to eradicate from my heart the thought that after my death I shall enjoy an infinite happiness beyond the sky, they shall never succeed."

At this point of his harangue, Ahatsistari shifted his discourse to one of the auditors in particular----Charles Tsondatsaa, an intimate friend of his:

"Dearest friend," he began, "If God's will is that I should be caught and that you should escape once back to our dear country, I beg of thee to approach my brothers and my parents and other relatives and thou tell them that if they have some love for me, and if they like their souls, let them embrace the Faith and adore that Divine Majesty which is invisible to our eyes, but makes itself felt in the innermost part of any one's being, only he does so much as to open his eyes to the truth."

*J. Adhemar Chapdelaine 51*