



ATER on I wondered whether our beloved Kateri Tekakwitha had been a Sodalist. In fact it wasn't until some days later . . . But let's begin at the beginning.

I was extremely busy with the young Catholics who had invited me to Montreal and a succession of Canadian cities. In fact I was scheduled to give about twenty talks in four cities within five days. So when I heard that one of my Jesuit missionary friends wanted me to visit his mission, my impulse was to say, politely but firmly, "Sorry; it just can't be done."

But Father Jacobs is a diplomat. Said he, by way of invitation: "You see, you can't come so close to the home and the shrine of the first American girl Sodalist without paying her a visit."

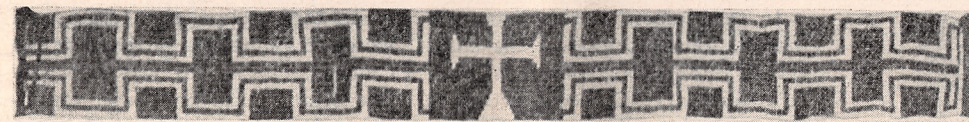
"Who's that?" I demanded, for the invitation had taken on a sharp and personal quality.

"Catherine Tekakwitha," he said.

Sodalist?

I began to wonder if she really had been a Sodalist. Women were not admitted into the Sodality when Catherine, the Lily of the Mohawks, was living among her pagan and Christian tribesmen. But then missionaries to the Indians had and still have strange powers: For instance they are allowed to have their choirs sing the Mass, not in Latin, but in Iroquois. So perhaps they did admit women into the Sodality back in the last half of the seventeenth century. Anyway if Catherine Tekakwitha was not actually a Sodalist, she was at least a forerunner of Sodalists, and, given the slightest opportunity, she would have been a very devoted child of Mary.

Father Jacobs and the young



Jesuit scholastic who is living among the Indians and learning their language picked me up that brisk autumn morning at Loyola College in Montreal and drove me

see their children leave them and Indian children can't tear themselves away from their families. Three centuries and a half"—he

French Jesuits to this continent about a century and a half before the American Revolution. And what tough fellows those Iroquois

her saintly days. Caughnawaga is the first of the famous Iroquois missions which brought the

hellish tortures these Indians invented for the missionaries who are today the great canonized North American Martyrs.

So to protect the Iroquois who became Catholics, a Jesuit priest in 1667 built a mission surrounded by high walls where his Iroquois converts could lead a Christian life without fear of the tomahawk and

## THE LILY OF THE MOHAWKS

By Daniel A. Lord, S. J.

laughed—"and the priesthood and the Jesuits finally got me."

A good "get" I thought it.

The far end of the bridge brought us from the modern city of Montreal into the Indian village of Caughnawaga. Down the streets toward the church trudged or trotted the villagers. Father Jacobs waved to

were! Their nations lived to eat and fight and lust and kill. They watched their neighbors, the Hurons, become Catholics, and they promptly set about extermi-

the stake. Because farm land was needed, the mission was moved twice, the second time to its present position, directly across from Montreal—whose numerous churches and modern buildings make the backdrop for Indian life. Kanawake, the mission was called, which means "below the rapids"; and though the mission is now above the rapids, Kanawake (in English, Caughnawaga) it still remains.

Through the high walls we entered the mission where young converts once defied their persecutors; we went into the priest's house, which formerly was the officers' quarters of the French garrison; then straight into the little room of archives, where all that is mortal of the lovely Lily of the Mohawks remains.

### Her Relics

Father Jacobs opened the safe in the wall and threw back a little door heavily padded with white silk.

(Turn back to page 31)



Left: Kateri Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks, stainless Indian maiden who lived a life of saintliness in the midst of one of the most cruel, savage, pagan Indians of the American tribes

one old brave—wrinkled, bent, but with the bright eyes of the primitive Indian.

across the great St. Lawrence—by way of the bridge. The toll-keeper saluted us cheerfully as we passed.

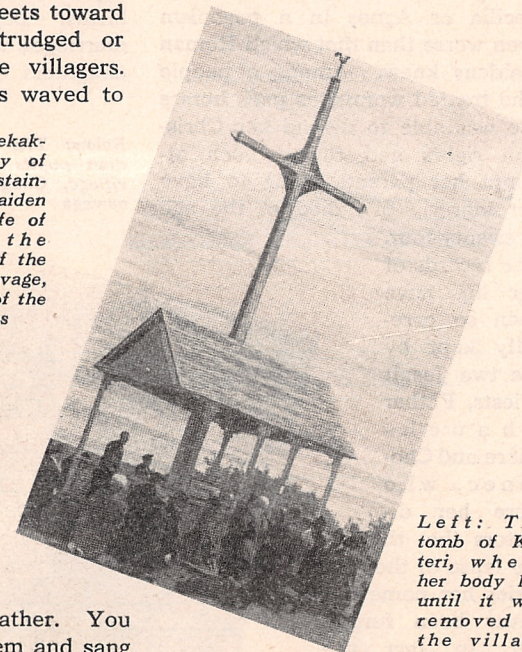
"My brother-in-law," said Father Jacobs, "and one of the few Indians working on the bridge."

I know my eyebrows lifted in surprise. So my priest friend continued: "Didn't you know that I'm an Indian? Indeed I am. It was almost 350 years before the Jesuits finally numbered among them a member of my Iroquois tribes. You may not know it, but among Indians love of family is so strong that Indian parents can't bear to

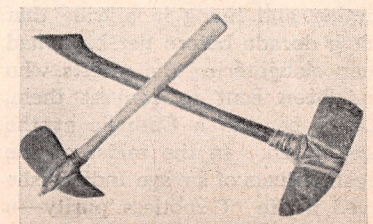
"My godfather," he explained. And then pointing toward a house, "And there live my mother and father. You see I came back to them and sang my first solemn high Mass in their parish church."

We cut sharply to the right and found ourselves on the edge of the swiftly moving river and on the spot which Tekakwitha had known and loved and where she had spent

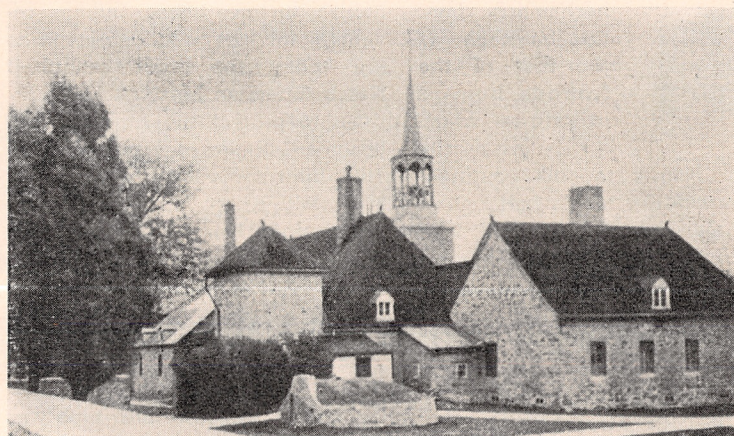
nating them. And when their own Iroquois, one by one, became Christians, they regarded them as contemptible weaklings who deserved only torment and death. I don't have to remind Catholics of the



Left: The tomb of Kateri, where her body lay until it was removed to the village church







Part of the older section of Caughnawaga, with the French powder magazine in the foreground and the steeple of the parish church in the background—a scene of quiet peace impregnated with the spirit of Kateri

Inside the safe was a casket covered with the same lovely white silk. This he reverently pulled out and opened. Inside, under a plate of glass, lie the precious relics of Kateri Tekakwitha. I looked at the now reddish bones that alone remain—most of her bones were burned in a mission fire—and I laid my hands on the glass. I've stood at some famous tombs, from Cecilia's in Rome and St. Peter's in the great basilica on Vatican hill to Napoleon's and Grant's and Lincoln's. Yet as I stood there, almost touching the bones of Kateri, I felt a tenderness and a rush of memories that were very sweet and very closely linked with the young people among whom has been my happy lifework.

#### Amazing Girl

For Kateri was an amazing little girl. Born of a pagan Iroquois father and a Christian Algonquin mother and living in a tribe that not a decade before her birth had been slaughtering the priests who had been sent to convert them, Kateri became a Catholic at the age of ten. In the midst of the gigantic lusts of savage Indians she lived a life of spotless purity—a

lily on a garbage heap. She took a vow of virginity, which she kept throughout her life, like a modern Cecilia or Agnes in a paganism even worse than that which Roman maidens knew. Among a people who treated women as pack horses she was able to defend her Christian rights and thwart each attempt her parents made to have her marry. She died at the age of twenty-four. The records of her life have been so carefully kept by the two Jesuit priests, Father Chaucetiere and Cholenec, who were her directors that through the lapse of the centuries her name has never been forgotten. In fact she stands a fine chance of being the first American woman to be raised to the altars of sainthood. Her cause has been moving along splendidly and rapidly in Rome.

In the person of this little girl the missionary priests of the early savage Indians won their most powerful auxiliary: Catholic Action in the Iroquois nations; Sodality activity by an Indian girl who knew only the rough life of an Indian village.

On her relics I laid the little medals and cards that Father Jacobs had given me; in her lily-white hands I placed the young men and women who today battle against a less savage but equally cruel and certainly more skillful paganism.

#### Ancient Records

Father Jacobs replaced the relics in their safe, and we turned to the archives that lined the walls: record books dating back to the early days of the Iroquois mission; births, baptisms, confirmations, marriages, funerals of the sons and daughters of savages who had in

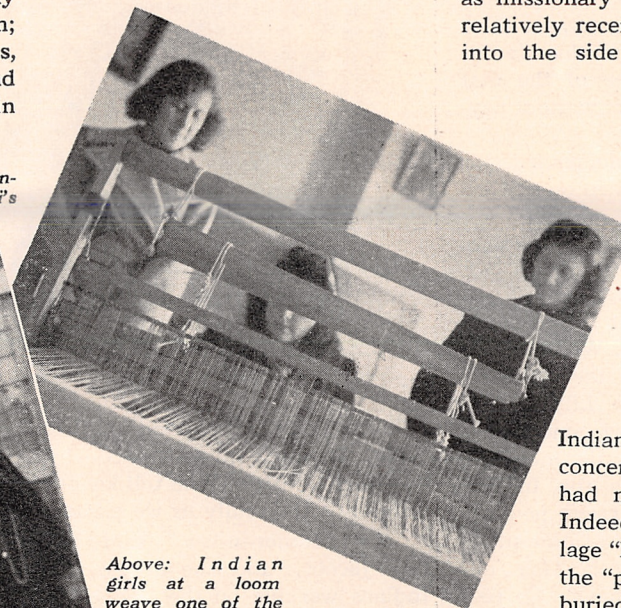
Below: The sister teachers and the Indian pupils at the school in Kateri's village, Caughnawaga



the end "fallen asleep in the Lord." Respectfully I handled the first Iroquois grammar and dictionary, which were drawn up with infinite labor by a priest who had to learn

from Indian lips the forms and words of a language far harder than Chinese. I saw the way in which Gregorian music had been rewritten to fit that language.

From another vault my guide drew forth one of the most precious wampum belts in the world—worth, experts have told him, as much as thirty-five thousand dollars. It was the lovely gift which the Hurons, long Christians, had sent to the Iroquois, their ancient enemies and killers, when these apparently not-to-be-converted savages finally accepted the Catholic faith. In the center of the belt is a cross worked sturdily on a rock base. The beads wander away from this cross in two directions



Above: Indian girls at a loom weave one of the rugs that perpetuate the Iroquois tradition of craftsmanship

and three lines—one straight and white, the other two torturous and colored in deep purple.

"When the messenger from the Hurons arrived to congratulate the converted Iroquois," Father Jacobs explained, "he brought this wampum, which was hung on a pole in

the center of the council ring. Then the messenger, as the orator of the occasion, rose and explained the meaning of the design. The twisted purple roads were the sad paths of those who go through life without the light of faith. The straight white road led to the cross, and those who traveled that way found peace and light and happiness."

Strange contrast, this message of peace and faith against the war clubs and tomahawks and savage knives that were another part of the mission's precious museum.

#### Everywhere Her Spirit

Father Jacobs took me around the mission; up onto the broad walls of the mission's central court; through the lovely church, which is, as missionary history is reckoned, relatively recent—rebuilt in 1845; into the side chapel where the

Indian Sodalities meet and confessions are heard in Iroquois, French, and English.

But the whole place, you felt, was impregnated with the spirit of Tekakwitha. As far as her

Indian tribesmen today are concerned, it is as if she had never left the tribe. Indeed they call their village "Kateri Tsi Tkaiaitat," the "place where Kateri is buried."

I vested to say Mass in Kateri's own church, once more aware, as I donned the Gothic vestments, of the timelessness and changelessness of the Church, and I entered the sanctuary, preceded by two sturdy Indian altar boys. The liquid Latin of the Mass . . . and then from the choir loft the voices (Turn to "Kateri Tekakwitha," p. 23)



# KATERI TEKAKWITHA

(Continued from page 31)



of the men and women singing in the adapted Gregorian the ancient joy of the *Gloria* and the beautiful truths of the *Credo* in the language that had been Kateri's and her contemporaries', the magnificent language of the powerful nations of the Iroquois.

Father Jacobs read the announcements from the pulpit, and again there was brought home to me the universality of the Church. First he made the announcements in Iroquois; then he repeated them in French; then he introduced me to the congregation in English. It was Mission Sunday, and as I took my place before those Indians, I had the feeling that I was privileged with the most perfect opportunity to celebrate it.

## Universality

So I talked about the universal motherhood of the Church. I, an American, I told them, speaking to them in Canada, was their brother in the faith; but—and I pointed to the niches in the walls around me—so were these men and women who looked upon them: Ignatius the Spaniard and Anthony the Italian, Joseph of far-off Galilee and Vincent of France, Louis the king and Xavier the professor, and Mary of a small town in Palestine.

As I talked, the surface differences of skin and feature faded away, and the barriers of language melted down, and there were, not a host of nations, but a great uni-

versal family, whose Father was the Father of all the living, whose mothers were Mary and the glorious Mother Church, and who were one in the great brotherhood of Jesus Christ.

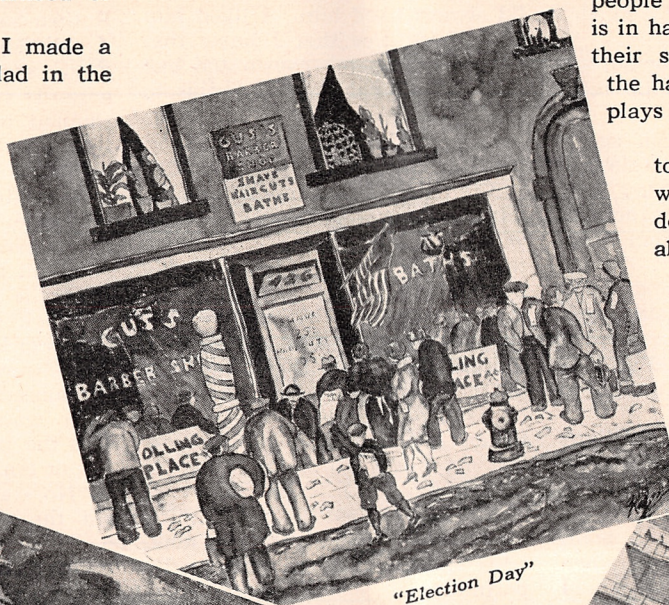
Mass was over, and I made a circuit of the village, glad in the knowledge that the young men and women who welcomed me were of the tribe of our beloved Tekakwitha. We visited the school where the Sisters of St. Anne teach the youngsters not only the essentials of mod-



"Mission Ranchos de Taos"

ern education but also weaving and the manual arts that might have been lost to the Indians had the schools failed to preserve them. I saw the lovely modern handbags woven by the Indian girls and the

Below are three of the canvases that have helped Louis Kaep win the title of one of America's foremost painters. The story of this remarkable Catholic artist is on page one



"Election Day"

fine work that only the Indian craftsman can produce with a carpenter's tools and which is most welcome in the metal industries.

The Sodalists of the school entertained me. They sang "For Christ the King" and "Mother Beloved" with a zest that ended for

me the legend that Indians even slightly suggest the stolid. They danced for me—a native Indian dance and a very swift and precise modern tap. I fancy that the beat of the drum in one's blood is a first-rate aid to tap dancing. Then just like children and young people anywhere else they took is in hand and showed us about their school, their playground, the hall where they give their plays and hold their parties.

And if we are not too sure that Catherine was a Sodalist, we are definite about the loyalty of these young In-



"Rooftops of Nice"

dians to the Sodality ideals. Devotion to Mary was everywhere around me.

Will this "first American girl Sodalist"—for so I shall always

think of her—soon receive the honors of canonization? Father John J. Wynne, S.J., who is promoting her cause, is hopeful that she will.

## Linked With Martyrs

"Though there were," he writes, "over six hundred causes for beatification and canonization awaiting action of the Congregation of Rites, when her cause was presented (1932), it was opened at once and the *Osservatore Romano* announced that rarely had any cause been so well prepared and documented. . . ."

"Are you aware that in 1884 the Fathers of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore linked her with the martyrs in their petition to the Holy See?

"The historical section of the Congregation of Rites has finished its work on her cause. That means that the cause is well along. We can have high hopes for important pronouncements at any time now.

"America clamored for a saint. It now has a glorious group of them in the canonized North American Martyrs. Tekakwitha may soon be added to that number."

Back I went from the mission to the Canadian Sodalists and the other Catholic young people across the St. Lawrence. Canadians, Iroquois, Americans—members of all races and peoples—What a race we Sodalists are! And how tremendous a thing it is to be a Catholic and thus linked with the vast historic past, with all the tribes of earth, and with the dwellers, like Kateri Tekakwitha, in heaven!