



KATERI TEKAKWITHA

Ed. LECOMPTE, S. J.

The Lily
of the
Mohawks

1656-1680

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THE MOHAWKS

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*Translated by
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KATERI TEKAKWITHA

Kateri Tekakwitha¹

1. — On the Banks of the Mohawk

(1656-1677)



KATERI TEKAKWITHA blossomed like a lovely lily on the banks of the Mohawk River. Her last years perfumed the shores of the St. Lawrence.

She was born in 1656 at Ossernenon, an Oneida village forty miles west of Fort Orange (now Albany). A few years before, Ossernenon had witnessed the martyrdom of Blessed Isaac Jogues and his companions René Goupil and John de la Lande. In 1659, the village moved up one mile farther north to a place called Kendaougue (now Auriesville).

The Oneidas were one of the five Iroquois nations, bold, daring, undaunted warriors inevitably clashing with the French when the latter went to war with their old enemies by way of the Richelieu and Lake Champlain.

1. This pamphlet is a brief summary of the complete Life of Kateri Tekakwitha by the same author.

Kateri's father was an Iroquois pagan, her mother, an Algonquin Christian baptized at Three Rivers and afterwards carried away a prisoner and married to an Iroquois. At the age of four, she lost her father, her mother and a younger brother and was adopted by an uncle, formerly chief of the village.

The child could hardly have learnt much from her mother, but a kind Providence was tenderly watching over her. The Holy Ghost Himself was to be her guide. Although unbaptized her naturally Christian soul became the fitting temple of God's grace, richly adorned with infused virtue.

Smallpox had carried off her parents and left her with marked features, weakened frame and dimmed eyesight. To avoid the sunlight she had to remain in her cabin, only going forth with her head wrapped in a blanket. She grew fond of this life of retirement which proved the safeguard of her virtue.

As a mere child Kateri showed herself intelligent, deft, winsome and remarkably fond of work for an Indian. Later on she developed great skill in handiwork. For the Indian's love of finery in headdress, clothing and footwear knows no bounds. But not for herself did Kateri weave fibre and dress skins and bark. Yet such indoor occupations contributed wonderfully to her love of solitude.

On the other hand, her natural charm could not escape notice and her aunts determined to give her in marriage. Their proposal met with a flat refusal.

On another occasion, when a young warrior was introduced to her, she fled from the cabin, declaring that she would return only after the suitor's departure.

This is the first inkling of the peerless gift of the Holy Ghost to our sainted maiden,—love of purity, perfect purity of soul and body,—the wonder of her life.

Meanwhile the Marquis de Tracy had struck terror into the hearts of the Iroquois by his expedition of 1666. The peace which he concluded with them was to last 18 years.

The following year, three Jesuits were sent to the Iroquois country to take up the work begun twenty-five years before by Father Jogues. They spent three days with Kateri's uncle. The child could only admire their zeal and fervor in silence. Either out of bashfulness or for fear of her uncle, Kateri dared not open her mind to them.

Father James de Lamberville was destined to prepare her beautiful soul for baptism and lay the solid foundations of her Christian training.

When he arrived in 1675, the village of Kendaougue had been moved a few miles upstream and was called Kahnawake or Caughnawaga (now Fonda).

Father de Lamberville soon detected young Tekakwitha among his hearers. She drank in, so to speak, his explanations of Christian doctrine which she at once put into practice in her devotions

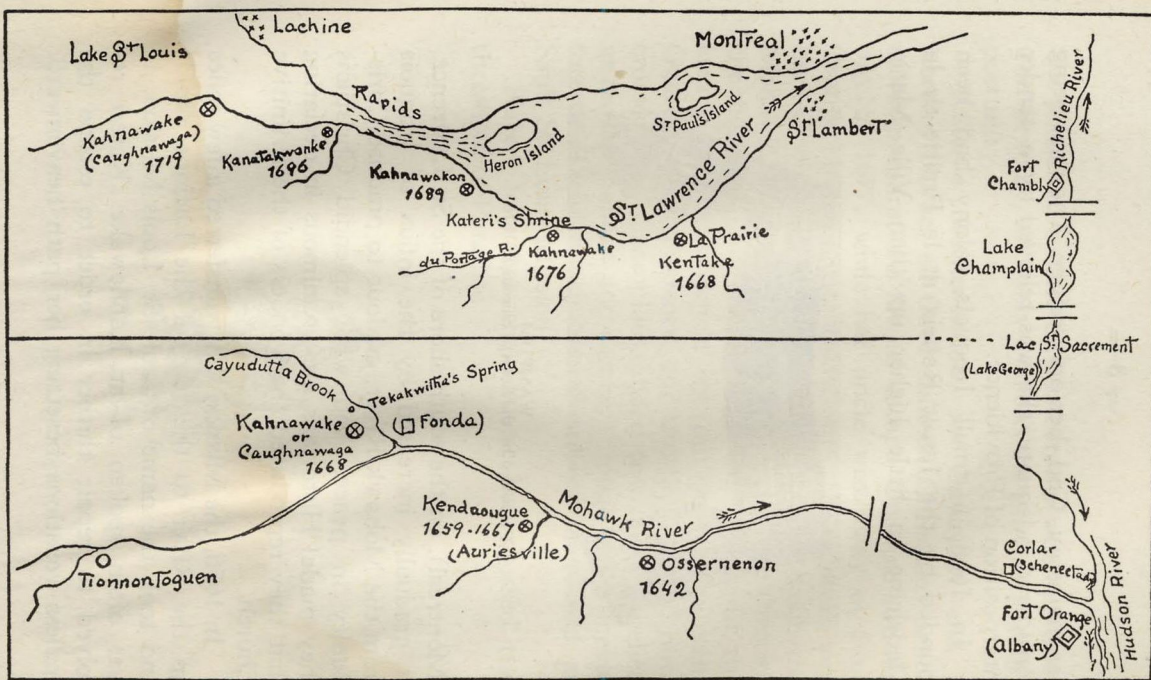
and charity towards those around her. Before long she craved the grace of baptism.

But owing to the proverbial inconstancy of the Indian character, missionaries were slow to grant this favor. The remaining months of 1675 were taken up by further instruction and closer scrutiny of her life and conduct. There was unanimity in proclaiming her virtue. The longed for favor was therefore granted. In the spring of 1676, on Easter Sunday, April 18, at the age of 20 she was baptized, receiving the name of Kateri. The whole village was filled with joy.

Father de Lamberville felt that he had given the Church an elect soul while Kateri Tekakwitha was flooded with heavenly bliss. She ardently entered upon the perfect way pointed out by the missionary: acts of charity, self-denial and devotedness, prolonged prayer in her cabin or in church—her only two resorts.

The Evil One could not witness undismayed the heroic flights of this generous soul. In an endeavor to check or dampen her ardor, he stirred up a formidable persecution against her. Admiration of Kateri turned to hatred. Her piety, her modesty, her purity were a standing reproach to the general corruption.

Her people began to mock and insult her. They threw stones at her, contemptuously calling her: "The Christian." One day a young man threatened to brain her with a tomahawk. She bore everything with unruffled meekness. Prayer was

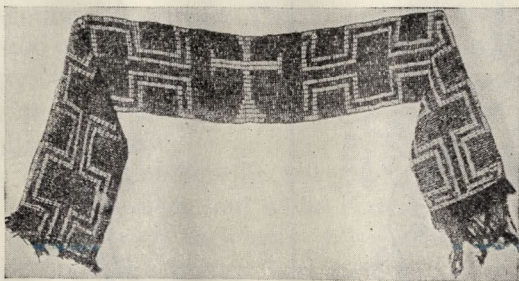


Above: Iroquois Missions on the shores of the St. Lawrence.

Below: Iroquois Missions on the banks of the Mohawk.

her mainstay, God, her only refuge. The trial being considered adequate, she was relieved by a tender interposition of Providence.

In 1668, a small Iroquois colony had been founded by the Jesuit Raffeix at la Prairie de la Madeleine, a little higher up than Ville Marie



WAMPUM
Presented by the Loretto Hurons in 1676.

(Montreal), on the south shore of the St. Lawrence. It gradually increased by the influx of Iroquois from the Mohawk River, anxious to practise Christianity in peace. And what splendid Christians they made! Historians are unanimous in declaring that they reproduced the wonders of the Primitive Church.

In 1676, the Mission was transferred a few miles up the River to the foot of the Lachine rapids and took the name of Sault St. Louis Mission. It was often spoken of at Kahnawake. Kateri resolved to repair thither in order to escape the endless vexations besetting her path heavenward.

She consulted Father de Lamberville who approved unreservedly, and only awaited the providential opportunity.

Kateri's brother-in-law, an Onneyout and a Loretto Huron, all three staunch Christians, made secret preparations for her escape. One fine autumn day of 1677, while her uncle was away at Fort Orange, her brother-in-law and the Huron embarked with her in a canoe and paddled down the Mohawk till they reached the path leading through the bush to Lake Champlain. On hearing of the escape, the irate uncle set out in hot pursuit. Guarded by Providence, our travellers eluded him, crossed Lake Champlain, glided down the Richelieu as far as Chambly and thence, through the primeval forests of the South Shore, arrived unscathed at Sault St. Louis Mission.

Kateri felt that she had at last crossed the threshold of Paradise.



II. — On the Shores of the St. Lawrence

(1677-1680)

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER Mission of Sault St. Louis was in all its fervor. The practice even of the most heroic virtues had become habitual to its inhabitants. They combined self-denial, humility and the severest austerities with charity, meekness and consideratiness for one another. And—most remarkable of all—this perfect harmony of heart and soul prevailed among representatives of various races, Iroquois, Hurons, Algonquins, Ottawas, Eries and Neutrals.

Kateri Tekakwitha carried with her a note from de Lamberville to Cholenec: "We are sending you a treasure which you will soon appreciate," wrote the missionary, "take good care of her."

This treasure was entrusted to Kateri's brother-in-law who had gone in quest of her. His wife, the neophyte's adopted sister, received her like an angel from Heaven. Among the members of the various families living together, according to Iroquois custom, in the same long cabin was a virtuous Christian called Anastasia. She had formerly known Kateri's mother and was now to prove a second mother to her.

In this peaceful village, in an atmosphere of work and piety, Kateri could at last give vent to her fervor. With her lofty idea of the Divine Majesty, she was wont to live in God's presence



MONSTRANCE

In solid silver, brought from France in 1668

and in all things to act most perfectly for love of Him. Her prayer became continual. Even amid household cares—for she was naturally industrious—her mind was not distracted from God. But prayer in church, before the Blessed Sacrament, was her great attraction. Although she had not yet made her First Communion, her heart instinctively went out to the adorable Prisoner of the Tabernacle. And thus in a short time, according to the testimony of the two missionaries at the Sault, Cholenec and Chauchetière, she soared in prayer to a sublime height.

Because of their fickleness, the Iroquois' First Communion was delayed even longer than their baptism. Their probation sometimes lasted several years. But Kateri's outstanding virtue called for an exception and her First Communion was set for the following Christmas.

Her preparation was that of an angel. The village Indians to whom she had become endeared wished to make a grand celebration. They decorated the church with unprecedented splendor. Amid lights and garlands and hymns, in the beautiful Christmas night, Kateri Tekakwitha first received into her heart the *Corn of the elect, the Wine springing forth virgins*.

Soon after she had to leave the village and the temple wherein dwelt the God of her heart. This was her keenest sorrow when she had to accompany her people into the woods for the winter hunt.

She sought to make up for her loss by erecting a little oratory near a stream not far from the hunters' hut. On the bank of one of the overshadowing trees she engraved a deep cross. There she often came to pray. In the morning especially, she united her intentions with those who had the happiness of attending Mass in the village. She united herself still more to Jesus by her ardent yearnings in a spiritual communion.

In the hut, while toiling with her companions, she would invite them to sanctify their work by pious conversation and hymns.



KATERI'S LITTLE SISTER AND BROTHERS
(XXth century)

The hunting party returned to the village for Holy Week. Its stirring ceremonies made a deep impression on the neophyte and kindled an ardent

love for the Passion of Our Lord. After her protracted absence she was at liberty to prepare for her second Communion. The strength which it imparted to her made her triumphant in a twofold trial.

The first was an atrocious calumny aimed at Kateri's virginal purity. But being the work of jealousy, this calumny was nipped in the bud by the missionary.

The other trial was more painful in a way because it came from her sister and from Anastasia. With the best of intentions and for Kateri's own welfare, as they believed, they committed the error of making to her a proposal of marriage. Kateri gently refused. They were so insistent that the missionary's intervention was needed to check their importunity.

At about the same time, a visit to Montreal brought her in touch with the nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu and of the Congregation. She returned with the desire of leading a more perfect life.

The Sault Mission, as we said, was in all its fervor when Kateri arrived there. Over and above other virtues, men and women practised the severest austerities. She surpassed them all in watching, in long fasts, in cruel scourgings, in wearing iron chains, in walking barefoot on the snow in mid-winter. The Passion and the sight of Jesus on the Cross spurred her on and kindled her love.

Amid the thorns of penance the lily of her purity blossomed. By this virginal innocence which

she preserved till the last moment of her life, Kateri Tekakwitha was a miracle of grace in the Iroquois Mission.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost she also took means to safeguard this purity. To mortification she joined devotion to the Blessed Virgin. She and her rosary were inseparable. She recited it everywhere with ever-renewed joy. On Saturdays and on the eve of Our Lady's feasts, she offered up special penances. Her love of the most pure Virgin induced her to solicit a favor hitherto unknown among Indian tribes.

On her visit to the nuns of Ville Marie she had learnt that these holy women consecrated to God the treasure of their virginity. She also wished to take the vow which transforms mortals in the flesh into angelic beings. She begged the favor of the missionary.

Her desire was genuine, but could it be realized? Virginity was unknown among Indians and apparently incompatible with their character. The Father hesitated, submitted the maid to further tests, then seeing her constancy and the graces ceaselessly flooding her soul, he granted the favor. With heartfelt joy Catherine chose the beautiful feast of Our Lady's Annunciation, March 25, 1679, to consecrate to Jesus her virginity under the protection of the Virgin of virgins. She had but one more year to live.

It was a year of deepest happiness, of sublime union with God and of suffering brought on by disease or self-imposed.

With Kateri's angelic purity went an intense devotion for Our Lord's Passion and an ardent love of the Blessed Eucharist.

In order to recall the memory of Jesus crucified, she wore on her neck and frequently kissed a little crucifix given to her by Father Cholenec. Moreover, as this narrative shows, she not only wore but generously bore the Cross of Christ.

Whence came her unflinching strength to make such daily sacrifices to God? From her love of the Divine Eucharist. Jesus in the tabernacle, Jesus in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Jesus in her heart through Holy Communion, Jesus was her life, Jesus was her delight. To Him she went as often as she could. It was a saying in the village that Kateri's only place was in her cabin or in church. Thither she dragged herself, despite her infirmities, and remained whole hours, seraphlike.

The lives of the greatest saints do not reveal a more ardent love than burnt in the heart of the saintly Iroquois for the august Sacrament of our altars.

Kateri Tekakwitha's strength was waning. The first months of 1680 brought the end in view. On Tuesday of Holy Week she was told that Our Lord was coming to her in Holy Viaticum. It was the custom to carry the sick to church to receive it, but owing to Kateri's weak condition and no doubt also to the general veneration for her, this custom was suspended and Jesus entered the poor cabin



KAHNAWAKON, third site of the Mission, showing (x) the old "Jesuits' Mill".

to give Himself to her whose only life was His love.

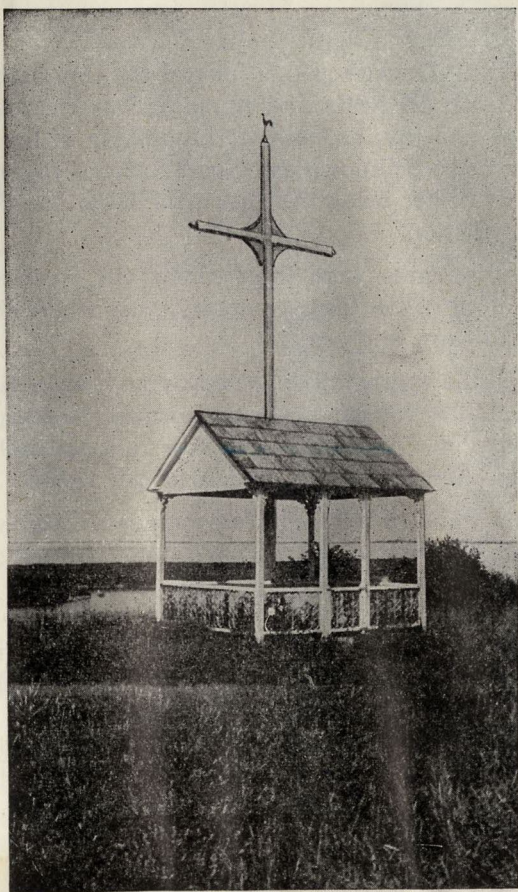
On the morrow she received Extreme Unction. It was her last day on earth. She spent it in intimate converse with the Three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity and with the loving Mother of God.

Towards three o'clock in the afternoon, a gentle agony set in: she became speechless while repeating the names of Jesus and Mary and at about half past three she expired peacefully as if falling quietly asleep. "The Saint has passed away," was the spontaneous verdict of the village people.

It was on Holy Wednesday, April 17, 1680. Kateri Tekakwitha was in her twenty-fourth year.

A quarter of an hour after death, her features disfigured by smallpox and then by sickness and penance shone with surpassing freshness and beauty. So much so that both her own people and the missionaries cried out that it was a miracle. It seemed as if the blessed soul of the departed shed over her virginal body a ray of the glory which she enjoyed in heaven.





KATERI TEKAKWITHA'S SHRINE

III. — Amid the Lilies of Paradise

KATERI TEKAKWITHA'S funeral the day after her death on Maundy-Thursday, was marked by sadness and joy: sadness at the passing of her who had come to be known as "Good Kateri," joy at the thought of her being in heaven the Guardian Angel of the Mission.

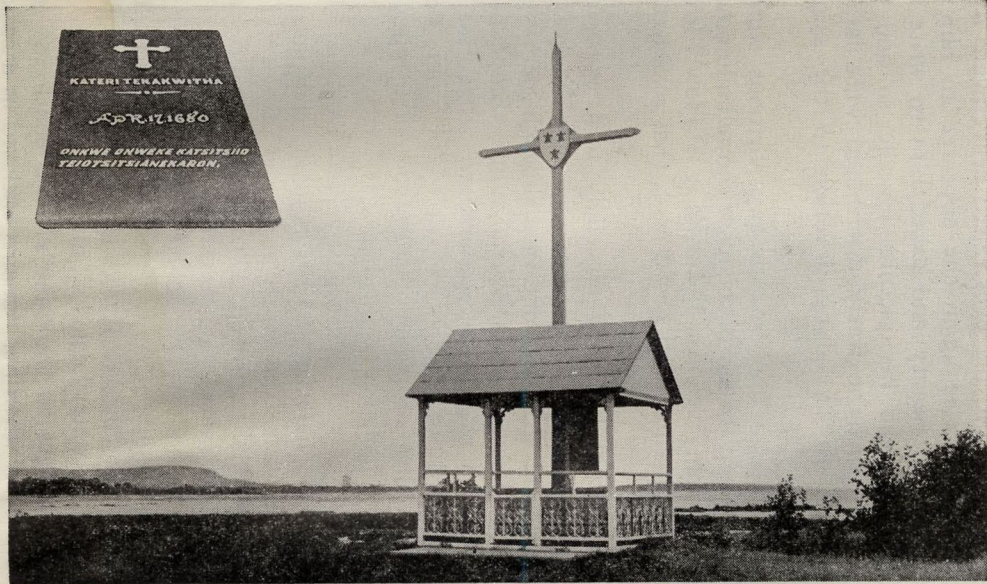
Her remains were interred by the river shore at the foot of the large cemetery cross where she so loved to come and pray.

Kateri's death was followed by an extraordinary renewal of devotion, fervor and penance throughout the Mission. Austerities were carried to such an excess that the Fathers had to check them.

The fame of her holiness spread far and wide. Wonders were wrought at her tomb. Thither came on pilgrimages Indians from Sault St. Louis and people from Laprairie, Lachine, Montreal and Quebec to acknowledge the benefits of her intercession and to crave new favors. There knelt in turn Mgr de Saint-Vallier, Bishop of Quebec, who called her "the Geneviève of Canada," the Marquis de Denonville, Governor of Canada, Séré de la Colombière, Vicar General of Quebec, Captain du Luth, founder of Duluth, Intendant de Champigny and many others.

Marvellous events aroused public confidence.

Thus, six days after her death, Kateri appeared in glory to Chauchetière, one of the missionaries,



KATERI TEKAKWITHA'S CENOTAPH

her face radiant, her eyes raised heavenward as in an ecstasy. Twice again she appeared to him refulgent with beauty and asked him to write her life and spread her picture. He did so and the pictures which he freely distributed were largely conducive to promoting devotion to the saintly maid.

Kateri also appeared to two virtuous women in the village. To one of them she showed a luminous cross saying: "See how beautiful it is! How I loved it while on earth and how I wish that all loved it as I did!"

But what appealed especially to the popular imagination and begot boundless confidence in Kateri were the cures obtained through her intercession. They became so numerous that Kateri Tekakwitha might be compared to St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, both dying at twenty-four, both spotless lilies of purity, both scattering miracles broadcast, like roses on a day of festivity.

Whatever had been used by Kateri gave health to the sick: her crucifix, her blanket, the plate in which she ate, the earth from her grave. The latter especially proved a panacea. No disease was proof against its mysterious power. The venerable Sulpician Pierre Rémy, parish priest of Lachine, declared that there were no more invalids in his parish, since earth from Kateri's tomb mingled with a little water healed all diseases.

Pilgrimages to the Saint's tomb continued unabated even when her remains enclosed in a casket and deposited in the chapel followed the various



RESIDENCE OF THE CAUGHNAWAGA MISSIONARIES
Built about 1720 — In the background, part of the Old Fort

migrations of the village to the present site of Caughnawaga. The missionaries were not numerous enough to say all the Masses promised in honor of Kateri.

Novenas were also made to obtain favors. The prayers recited during such novenas were an *Our Father*, a *Hail Mary* and three *Glory be to the Father*.

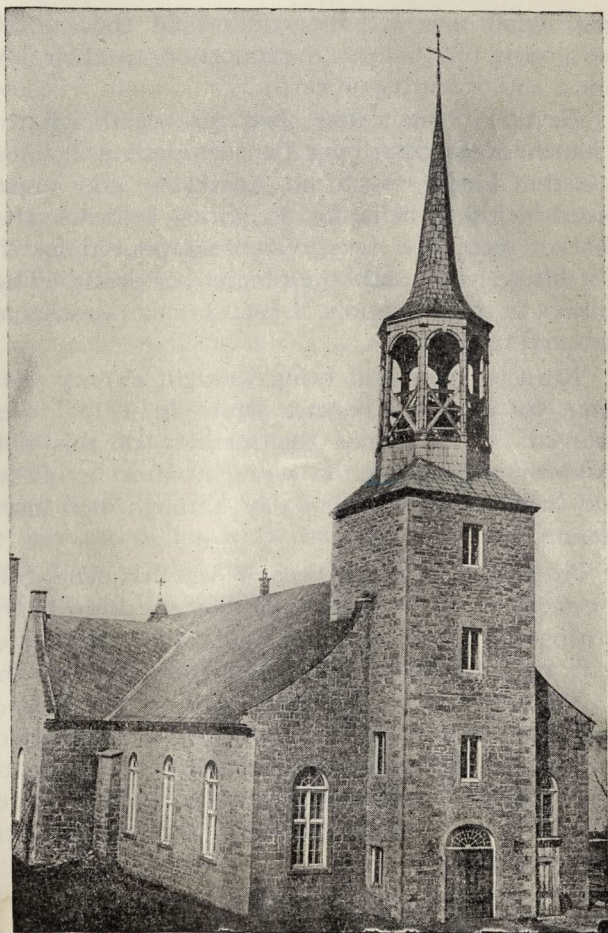
Often the mere promise of a pilgrimage, a novena or even the mere invocation of the name of Kateri overcame the most inveterate diseases.

Needless to say that we cannot in these few pages dwell at length on the innumerable cures wrought throughout the colony and even in France where Kateri's fame soon spread. These wonders are related in our *Life of Kateri Tekakwitha*¹.

We shall merely quote the evidence of three biographers of the Saint, the two latter being moreover her spiritual guides and eye-witnesses of many marvels which they report.

The great historian of New France, Charlevoix, wrote: "Thus as the Capital of Old France saw a Shepherdess, so New France saw a poor Indian girl outshine in glory Apostles, Martyrs and Saints of all conditions. God no doubt willed, for our

1. *Une vierge iroquoise, CATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, le Lis des bords de la Mohawk et du Saint-Laurent*, par le P. Ed. LECOMPTE, S. J., Montreal, Messenger Press, 1927. 75c. postpaid.



CHURCH OF CAUGHNAWAGA

Built in 1845

instruction and for the comfort of the humble, to glorify His Saints in proportion to their lowliness and obscurity on earth."

Several years after Kateri's death, Father Chauchetière, describing her astounding holiness, added: "Lastly, such an incredible and unprecedentedly thing calls for weightier evidence than that of men. We have evidence produced for the last fifteen years and beginning at her death." Then follows an enumeration of the various miracles attributed to the Saint.

Miracles were still being wrought twenty years later, for Father Cholenec wrote in 1715: "God delayed not to honor the memory of this holy maid by countless cures wrought after her death and still wrought every day through her intercession."

After a time cures became less frequent. Still the memory of the Servant of God set down in the writings of Cholenec and Chauchetière, somewhat later by Charlevoix, revived at the dawn of the XIXth century by Chateaubriand in his *Natchez* and more recently by various historians,—her memory survives especially in the hamlets of the South Shore. On her tomb a large cross was always carefully kept up through the zeal of the local Indians and white people.

Her remains, as we stated, accompanied the village in its migration to the present site of Caughnawaga, where they are preciousely kept under seal. A portion of them had been given in 1754 to the Iroquois Mission of St. Regis recently founded

at that place. They disappeared in a conflagration which destroyed the chapel where they were preserved.

A few fragments were deposited for the first time in the basis of the large cross raised on the tomb in 1843 to replace the former one. This was the occasion of an imposing ceremony which drew to the tomb several members of the clergy and a large gathering from the Indian village, the neighboring parishes and the city of Montreal. Struck down by the wind in 1885, this cross was at once set up again.

In 1890 a still finer memorial was raised and blessed, a splendid granite cenotaph due to the generosity of the Reverend Clarence Walworth, Rector of St. Mary's, Albany. It is surrounded by a pretty iron railing and surmounted by a roof and a large cross containing a relic. On the cenotaph are engraved the words:

KATERI TEKAKWITHA

Apr. 17, 1680

Onkweonweke katsitstio

Teotsitsianekaron

Translation:

KATERI TEKAKWITHA

Apr. 17, 1680

*The loveliest flower that blossomed
among the Indians*



PRESENT VILLAGE OF CAUGHNAWAGA (Eastern Section) — View from the church steeple.

The ceremony was presided over by three bishops attended by some sixty priests. Over two thousand people came from Montreal, Caughnawaga and the neighboring parishes.

Other pilgrimages arrived to pay their tribute of homage and gratitude to the Lily of the Mohawks and pray for new favors.

The fame of Kateri's holiness induced the Fathers of the Third Council of Baltimore to link her name with those of Isaac Jogues and René Goupil in a petition to the Holy See for their beatification. In 1922, the present bishop of Albany, the Right Reverend Edmund F. Gibbons, renewed the petition of the Council of Baltimore and obtained from the General of the Society of Jesus that his Order cooperate in promoting the Cause. The latter is progressing favorably. Quite recently Rome permitted the opening of the diocesan investigation.

The Jesuits who in 1903 returned to their old Caughnawaga Mission, gladly help to glorify the young Iroquois maid whom they baptized on the banks of the Mohawk, received at the Mission by the shores of the St. Lawrence and led by the ways of virtue to the most exalted sanctity.

May all earnestly unite in beseeching God soon to grant miracles through the intercession of Kateri Tekakwitha!

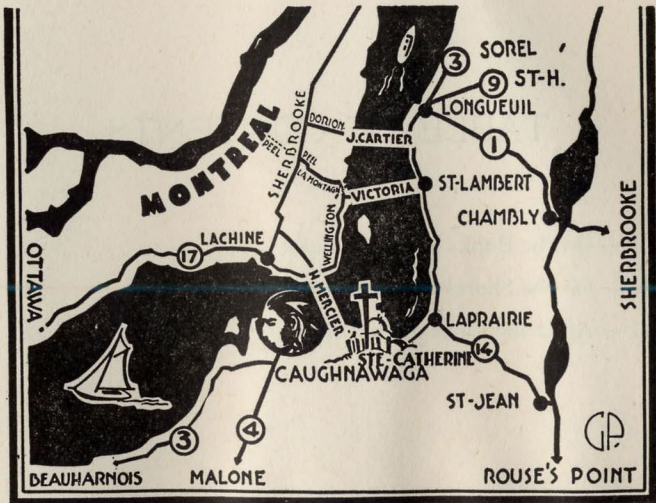
What a sight we shall then have! A lovely lily of spotless white, sprung from the thorns of

paganism, watered with a heavenly dew, then transplanted to a thicker soil and now set upon the altars of Canada and the United States to perfume them with its everlasting fragrance.

Such will be the miracle of purity—its apotheosis.



Routes from Montreal
to Caughnawaga
and Kateri Tekakwitha's Shrine.



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