

I AM INDIAN



The Life of Kateri Tekakwitha



"I Am Indian"



I Am Indian

the Story of

Kateri Tekakwitha

by

Rev. Gualbert Brunsman, O.S.B.



St. Paul's Indian Mission
Marty, South Dakota
1956

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PRINTED AT:

ST. PAUL'S INDIAN MISSION
Marty, South Dakota

In our School Printing Shop, with the help of our Indian Printing
Students and their Instructor, Mr. James W. Toon.

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First Printing, July, 1956
Second Printing, July, 1958

Note: The Prayer contained in this booklet on page 54 is taken
from the booklet "Tekakwitha" by Rev. John J. Wynne, S.J. under
the imprimatur of † Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of
New York, February 2, 1940.

The author is deeply grateful to Miss Ade de Bethune for the
illustrations which she so beautifully did for this booklet.

Dedication

*To Kateri Tekakwitha, as a present
for the three-hundredth anniver-
sary of her death in the Year 1656.*

Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to the following: Most Reverend William O. Brady, D.D., Archbishop of St. Paul, Minn., for reading and correcting the first draft of 'I Am Indian', and offering many suggestions. Rev. Jerome Palmer, O.S.B., St. Meinrad's Archabbey, Mother Jerome, O.S.B., Sacred Heart Convent, Yankton, S. Dak., Rev. Thomas Coffey, S. J., Vice-Postulator of Kateri's Cause in the United States, Rev. Henri Bechard, S. J., Vice-Postulator in Canada of her Cause, Mother Mary of Lourdes, Marty, S. Dak., and Sister Anne Marie, Marty, S. Dak. All of these helped by reading, correcting and typing 'I Am Indian'.

Chapters

1. "I Am Indian"	13
2. We Moved	17
3. In Danger	21
4. A New Life	29
5. The Test	33
6. The Praying Castle	39
7. My Happiest Day	43
8. "I Vow to Thee"	47





Purpose

THE AUTHOR intends this little book as a guide to the truly extraordinary life of the Venerable Servant of God, Catherine Tekakwitha, an Indian Maiden born three hundred years ago this year. Considering the times in which she lived, and the setting in which her conversion and sanctification took place, her life is in itself a kind of miracle.

After a pilgrimage to the feet of Kateri (the Indian spelling for Catherine) in Caughnawaga, Quebec, where her relics are kept, and to Auriesville, New York, the scene of most of her earthly life, the author was inspired to give this account of her life, first of all to the descendants of her people the Indians, among whom he is engaged as a Missionary, so that that sorely tried race may see something of the courage which animated her, and may strive to emulate their little Sister Kateri, surely their most precious inheritance.

The author owes a debt of gratitude to many friends, readers of "THE LITTLE BRONZED ANGEL" and helpers of the works of our Mission, where nearly five hundred little brothers and sisters of Kateri are being taught how to come close to Raweniio (Iroquois word for God). He hopes this little work will in some measure pay his debt, and at the same time inspire others who may read it to come to the aid of our Indians who live so often spiritually bewildered and materially insecure.

The author has tried to clothe the skeleton of Kateri's life with the flesh of human words, telling the facts in the first person. Her deeds are well known and speak louder than any words. They show us that they

are the product of an intelligent plan well carried out under circumstances where even saints have practiced virtue with difficulty.

The author does not wish to anticipate any decisions of the Sacred Congregation of Rites when he speaks of the "Saintliness" of Kateri.



Foreword

by Rev. Henri Bechard, S.J.
Canadian Vice-Postulator

SOME DAY a poor little Indian Girl of long ago will be raised to the honors of the altar. We then will pray to "Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha".

Her life, as retold in the first person by Father Gualbert, will uplift your hearts in thanksgiving for the great lesson she all unwittingly taught. To be sure, we cannot imitate her mode of existence in the wilderness, but we can humbly take into our hearts and let flower there her spirituality.

Kateri, who became a Christian at the late age of twenty, and who died at twenty-four, practised the "little Way" long before St. Therese of Lisieux.

How she did achieve heroic faithfulness to all the Christian virtues — a sundering charity toward God and her neighbor, a purity which merited for her the title, Lily of the Mohawks? By the same means at our disposal, whether we live in the teeming jungle of a large city or the quieter towns and villages of the world: effective devotion to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and His Mother.

Some great Saints endured ecstasies resulting in levitations and as they ascended heavenwards, found themselves tangled in apple trees. These extraordinary ways of sanctity, which do not necessarily imply greater holiness, were not Kateri's and, perhaps, not ours. But Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady are just as near to us today as they were to the spotless Lily of three centuries ago. All we must do, to follow her example is to go to them.

In thanksgiving to God for the Lily of the Mohawks, may I suggest a great practical love of her people, the Indians of North America, and also a daily offering of a prayer and the weekly donation of a Communion for her early Beatification?



1. "I Am Indian"

I AM TEKAKWITHA, a little Indian girl who was born to my Algonquin mother just three hundred years ago (1656). My mother was at that time a captive Christian woman, taken prisoner when the Mohawks came into our village and burned it and carried off all that they did not kill into their country, the valley of the Mohawk river. My father was a Mohawk Chief in the village of Ossernenon.

I cannot remember very much about my mother, since I was only four when she died. I cannot remember anything she said to me, but I do remember her tone of voice, and that she was very gentle and loving. We had much misery during those first years of our lives among the Mohawks, and I must have cried often since even little children seem to sense when their mothers are suffering. My aunties told me later that I had all the traits of my mother Kahenta, whom they considered a good woman, but very stubborn. But of course I knew that they could never understand our people because many of them had been Christian for many years, and what seemed necessary for us to carry out our Christian way of life seemed foolish to them, and besides the Mohawks had many ways about them which were so very different from ours. My aunties always threw it up to me that I had drunk in the Religion of the Whiteman with my mother's milk, and that I would never be a real Mohawk, but always remain an Algonquin like my mother. As hard as I tried to be a good Mohawk, nothing that I thought or said or did seemed to please them.

Because of these things I naturally had a hard time to grow up without seeming to be inferior to the

others around me, and they made many efforts to make me believe this.

My mother's first lesson must have influenced me more deeply than I thought at first. I seemed to have had the impression that all children had to be treated roughly, for I saw many fathers and mothers treat their children that way; especially the more distant relatives did this. I understood this especially well, since I knew we all had to become hardened to suffering, of which there was so much in our daily lives. But my mother tried hard to shield me from this as long as she lived. When she died, this of course all ended, and I was alone.

I think it might be interesting to tell you how my mother came to die. It happened during one of those epidemics of the smallpox which swept into our village every so often. People died all around us and all that the sorcerers did with their pagan methods seemed useless; in fact the Mohawks were blaming their warriors for bringing us Algonquins into their village of Ossernenon, and they said that their gods were displeased because we were Christians. They even took some of our people and killed them, hoping thereby to stop the anger of their evil spirit.

Mother, father and my little brother and I shared what seemed to be a common deathbed on the floor of our allotted long house. My mother, (Kahenta was her name) spoke many words of prayer to Raweniio who was the God of the Whiteman. As long as she could speak she prayed the prayers which she knew from the Missionaries. It seemed to me that the most urgent petition she made was that I should not die without baptism. She said that Ondesonk's spirit (the name of Father Isaac Jogues) was hovering near and

by some miracle would send a blackrobe in time before it was too late. She bent over my little brother and me, always with these prayers on her lips, to see if the breath of life was still in us. But God took her before us, and her wish for our baptism was not then fulfilled. As I look back on it now, I see that she must have suffered so much over this, that it might be the reason for that wonderful grace to have been given to me later. When I was old enough to understand all that it did for me. I was so sick when she died that I did not know of it until days later, when I heard my two aunties arguing about what they were going to do with me.

The village was in a terrible uproar, and many braves were rushing by the curtained door of our long house carrying rude stretchers covered with blankets, to the burying pit outside the village. The women were wailing over their dead amid the drum beating and the incantations of the sorcerers. The noise and confusion seemed to work itself into my brain until I imagined that I would be the next one that they would come for. But through the prayers of my mother, Raweniio gave me my life to live in my mother's place.

The greatest confusion came the day my father, the Chief of the village was taken by the dread disease. In the twilight the people were gathered to burn victims (captives) to Manitou, the spirit of evil, because of the death of their Chief. The village dogs, always very numerous, ran howling through the village streets to add to the general din, all but drowning out the death cries of the victims.

A certain Anastasia, who was a good Christian friend of my mother, looked after me during the ten days that I lingered between life and death. Many

thoughts ran through her mind about my future. Would I, if I lived be swept into the current of the moral decay that lay so heavily upon that village? Would I have to struggle against the common sin of drunkenness as the other young girls did? Fire water was the scourge of our people because the Whiteman brought it to the Indians in exchange for their trappers' hides and the women's beautiful bead and wampum work.

After I was a little better and was lying in the long house, one day the new Chief Iowerana came in and talked very seriously to his wife Karitha and her sister Arosen. They must have been talking about me and my future because they kept looking at me as they talked. I did not care very much because I was still very weak. The only earthly thing I had left after my father, mother and little brother had died was my old husk doll, which I held on to as though it were part of me. It was at this time too that I found out that my eyes were very badly affected by the smallpox because I could just barely see the hole in the top of the long house, where the smoke went out through the roof. Karitha and Arosen soon discovered my trouble and brought in sorcerers who performed different kinds of incantations over me, to no avail. Even then I knew that these things would not help me in the least. Anastasia too came in often to teach me simple little prayers to Raweniio, which I loved and thought very beautiful.

It was not long before I had learned to walk all over again, but it took a long time before I got enough strength back to do any work. It was during this time that I learned that Chief Iowerana, Karitha and Arosen had decided not to get rid of me, which would have been easy to do, since I could not run away, but to keep

me and adopt me into the Chief's family. After all, he did not have any children, and there would have to be someone who would in time marry a good strong young hunter and warrior, to provide for their old age. With this in mind, they accepted me as their own, but they could never forget that I was the daughter of a captive Christian Algonquin woman. This seemed to bother them, and they were afraid that I would remember too much about my mother and her people, and so they took great pains to make me forget. But, being a "stubborn Algonquin" these means which they took seemed to make me keep the impressions of my mother all the more strongly. As I see it now, these must have been the greatest of graces at play in even this my earliest life. My mother was praying for her "little owl", as Anastasia told me my mother used lovingly to call me.



2. We Moved

I HAD BETTER tell you something now about the place in which we lived. It seems to me we did not live too long in Ossernenon after we had the smallpox, because the sorcerers said that the Manitou was displeased with that place. In reality the new chief was bent upon moving the entire village across the Mohawk because he and his council thought the disease would return if they stayed in that village. It would not have been unreasonable to think so, con-

sidering the filth that filled the streets and even the long houses. In fact, the villages (or Castles as they were called) were moved quite frequently also for the practical reason of deceiving our enemies who every so often came to destroy the Mohawks. Our clan belonged to what was called the Turtle castle.

The beauty of the Mohawk valley was one of the few consolations that I had in those days while I was recovering my strength. Fall and Spring of the years were always so very beautiful that I could not refrain from running out into the woods and hiding there. My Indian nature seemed to fit me for that, for whenever things went wrong in the long house I always took refuge in the woods which led down to the Mohawk river. After all the River was God's smooth highway, and all the news between the villages or from other places, always came by way of the river. I believed that some day there would be someone to come after me and return me to my own people. In these excursions, I noticed that the bright sunlight hurt my eyes very much and so I did not dare stay out too long. In fact, after I was able to do some work again, I hardly ever got out of the long house of my uncle (now my father by adoption) except to get water and wood. It seemed like I was destined to spend most of my life indoors, which was hard because I loved Raweniio's beautiful things very much. At this time Anastasia and my aunts began to teach me the arts of the needle, because they wanted to be sure that I would become a useful squaw. I guess I was not a very pretty girl because of the marks smallpox left on my face, but skill with the hands was more desirable to a brave than beauty — so said my aunts.

I could tell that my uncle (now my father by adoption) liked me very much, but he never wasted

many words on sentimental expressions. I knew that he was pleased with me when he sat down in our part of the long house and was quiet. It seemed to me that the greatest expression of appreciation came when he used to say: "Tekakwitha, give me my pipe." Contentment would steal over his face after a few puffs from his pipe, and I thought him a good father. One thing I could not stand was quarreling between him and Karitha and Arosen, which was rather frequent, especially when the quarreling was over me, after the two women had made reports about my disposition. He was always inclined to side with me, and that always made them the more angry, so that after he had left the long house, they would take it out on me.

Before the village was moved there was always much celebration. I dreaded these feasts because there was always much drunkenness and the evils that went with drink. What I detested most was their offering sacrifices and prayers to their evil spirit. The only thing I could do on such occasions was to run into the woods, only to be upbraided by Karitha and Arosen for not taking part in their festivities. But, how could I enjoy seeing victims tortured and slain? One of the most hideous sights was to see the dogs gnaw off what had been left on the human bones that lay scattered in the streets.

Along with the seeming confusion there was much good order among the Iroquois. They were composed of the five nations which were all located in the valley of the Mohawk river, all the way from its source to where it flowed its peaceful waters into the Hudson in the East, to Niagara to the West. Each of these five nations had to be careful not to transgress the boundaries which had been fixed by the council, at

which each nation was represented. Each nation had its villages, usually made up of about fifteen houses, clustered about a central square, which contained a post where captives were tortured and put to death.

I knew that some of these nations had received the religion of the Whiteman from the Missionaries, and I would have given my life to be in any of these nations. But the Mohawks, the fiercest of the nations, had put the Blackrobes to death with their stone hatchets. I could never be at home with them, for I loved the Blackrobes very much. After the five nations, the Mohawks, the Oneidas, the Onondagas, the Cayugas and the Senecas had their council meeting our village was moved to the other side of the Mohawk and was called Gandawague (by the rapids).

We moved here when I was ten. I did the things which I could do, gathering wood and carrying water for our long house. I could not stand the open light of day, so I was already making beadwork, corn husk shoes and many other pretty things even before I was ten years old. Everyone said that no one in the village made better and prettier things than I did. My aunts took great pride in dressing my hair and putting these pretty things into them. I felt that these things were not necessary and later came to see that this vanity was wrong, and would not indulge in it any more. I also found out that the reason they would dress me up so much was because they wanted me to look attractive to the young braves who were always brought into our long house. Karitha and Arosen would sit and eye me to see if the braves met with any approval from me. But I always disappointed them, and I used to run out of the long house if they would begin to make remarks that displeased me. The thought of my

mother somehow always came to my mind at such moments and I would remember Raweniio (God) whom I did not wish to displease in any way.



3. In Danger

WE INDIANS in the Mohawk valley began to hear rumors from various messengers who slipped their canoes up the Mohawk that many changes were taking place in the eastern part of our great country. Various bargains and treaties had already driven many of our neighboring tribes westward, and we were all beginning to be more and more uneasy about the steady encroachments of the Whiteman. While the Dutch were considered our best neighbors to the East, we were never quite sure that they would be able to subdue all our enemies. My father, the Chief Iowerana, had always talked nicely with the Dutch, even though he had a feeling that the Dutch took terrible advantage of him and his hunters in the trading post, for often his best pelts were bartered for only a few trinkets; what he rather wanted was guns and bullets. The Dutch were good neighbors in spite of this. It was shocking to us when we heard that the Dutch had been miserably surprised by the English, who had come with a very large force under the Duke of York and had overrun the entire Dutch colony, forcing them to sign a treaty in 1667. By this treaty the Dutch had to



I AM INDIAN

give up practically all the territory which they had obtained from the Indians until then. We were beginning to feel that our home in the Mohawk valley was no longer safe, especially when we knew that the French in the North would contest some of the conquests of the English. My father worried much about this and was even willing to go out to the English to make treaties as the safest way out of the difficulties.

Things like this were our daily life as I was growing up. In our village there was the usual noise and confusion which are always connected with the coming and going of hunters and warriors. The boys and girls I had known and played with grew into maturity with the knowledge of the ways of the forest and river which was customary and necessary for our people to know.

I was considered the daughter of the chief and was therefore a princess, and it used to make me laugh what my mother would have thought had she known it.

I knew that my aunts heaped attentions upon me and dressed me up mostly for their own advantage, and that kept me from getting proud, and also kept me from enjoying the finery in which they dressed me. I got rather used to it and did not make much over it, except when they tried to match me with some young brave. Then I grew uneasy.

About this time my father got the idea that it would be good for me to be betrothed to a boy about my own age. This was not unusual, since this was even done sometimes when children were only babies. It would not have been bad, except for the constant nagging of my aunts about an early marriage for me to a good warrior and hunter who would provide for Iowe-

rana in his old age. Our people were a practical lot and human wisdom became the rule of their life. The doctrine of the Blackrobes had not yet reached the hearts of our people, and they knew almost nothing about the life beyond the grave.

My aunts made me do all the work about the long house. I did not mind this except when they were two-faced about it. They loved to show me off in public, while in private they made me their little slave. It was lucky for me that I liked to work, because as long as I kept busy, they did not bother me about other quarrelsome things, and they often admired the swiftness of my fingers when I was doing needlework.

I could never understand why our warriors sometimes went out to fight neighboring tribes in the dead of winter, but I suppose it was the time our enemies least expected it, and the element of surprise was often the thing that won our wars. The squaws and the old men and children were always in danger when our men set forth, not only from being attacked, but also from the severe cold that practically brought life in the Mohawk valley to a standstill. It was on such occasions that I tried to do useful things to keep my aunts from complaining. But as hard as I tried I could not succeed. I would rather go out into the cold and search for wood in the deep snow than sit in the long house and hear their complaints.

The Algonquins, a peace-loving nation were often worried by the warlike dispositions of the Mohawks, especially since they often made raids into their territories. In 1666 the Algonquins enlisted the French to put an end to the trouble. Accordingly a party of several hundred French soldiers, under the Governor de Courcelle started South in the dead of Winter, but

their progress was so hampered by the deep snow and the bitter cold they encountered, that they almost gave up. They accordingly lost their way and came upon a hunting party of Mohawks. There was a fight and the French retreated without success. Rumors began to grow that the French would not rest until the Iroquois were punished. But Iowerana felt sure that his troubles were over. However this was contrary to fact. I would omit mention of these things except that they led to some important changes in our way of life in that the French indeed came, humiliated the Mohawks into submission once and for all, and most important, they brought with them a Blackrobe. I can say that even though we suffered defeat and had to rebuild our castle, I was glad beyond words at the welcome sight of the Blackrobe. For this was the beginning of the conversion of many of the Mohawks, although it was many years before the work of the Blackrobe bore full fruit. Any chance from the usual moral decay in our villages would be a good change.

What now took place in our village on the banks of the Mohawk settled our fate until I was twenty-one years old. It was in 1667 when a strong war party made up of the French and a large party of Canadian Indians led by de Tracy was reported by some of our scouts to be rapidly approaching the mouth of the Mohawk, with the intention of avenging the killing of some of the French by one of our hunting parties.

Even before there was any sight of this war party, Iowerana, our chief, and the other braves saw that this would be the end of our nation, and that there would never remain in us any further desire to wage those wars which had molested the French for

so long. There was an earnestness in the forebodings of our sorcerers. These sorcerers had busied themselves like gossiping women and had learned from a scout that it was a regular army that was coming against us, cannons, guns and all. To most of our people it seemed as though they were speaking prophetically. They were thus able to arouse very great commotion in our villages. Raweniiio made use of these tools of the devil to cause us to make preparations as eventually saved all our lives. Everybody was going about mustering all the hatchets and other instruments which our warriors wielded when wars were fought. In the last few moments there were some captives who were burned and tortured to appease the war Spirit. I could never attend such terrible cruelties; even the thought of them made me tremble all over. The women in the fields also began running into the village amid the din and outcry that had been set up. Gathering up their papooses and as much food and precious trinkets as they could in the short time that they remained, the women began to beat a hasty retreat to the village that was farthest removed from where the attack was likely to occur. It was not easy for me, since my eyes were almost blinded by the bright sun.

Our warriors had decided upon a course which they reasoned would save as many lives as possible, since our force was no match for the French. They decided to make a retreat to the last castle where they took their stand, so that when de Tracy came upon the first villages, he found them deserted except for a stray dog here and there. But the French pushed on knowing that eventually they would come upon our warriors. They burned the corn fields and the villages as they went. We saw the billowing smoke of the burn-

ing villages and our hearts were very heavy. This act of war was expected since the French had come to avenge the death of some of their scouts the year before.

When the men had taken their places on our stockades saw the superior numbers and the cannons of the French, they took to their heels into the woods where they awaited their fate. But nothing happened until they heard the French lift up their voices in praise of Raweniiio in a Latin song which shook the hills. Never had anything so beautiful been heard, and I knew that our day of deliverance was at hand. We all stood in wonderment, and we got glimpses of the figure of a Blackrobe, the most longed-for sight I had seen in many moons.

After having planted a huge Cross in the midst of what had been our village, the French retreated, knowing that here was no need of bloodshed, and that our Mohawk warriors would never again go on the war path. That same Fall (1667) we sent of our chief men to make treaties with the French in Canada. And we all set about the task of rebuilding what remained of our villages, using the bark of trees and hides to mend what could be mended. I could have wept over the fact that in the rush of departing, I was not able to save much of the fine wampum and beadwork at which my hands had labored so long. But the labor to find some food in the fields and bushes soon supplanted any foolish anxiety over trivial things like that. Our fields and long houses were empty, but by means of wild herbs and berries we were able to live through that terrible winter. It was about this time that I began to know that my desire to see the Blackrobes come back to us would soon be realized.



I knew too that since our chiefs had gone to the French they would have to satisfy all the demands before any treaty would be signed.



4. *A New Life*

THE SPRING OF 1669 had worn off into middle summer before the braves returned to our village from the country of the Whiteman. Now everybody was anxious to know what had been accomplished, since they had been gone so long. One day a runner came up from the river bank with the news that three canoes, perhaps more, were on the river approaching the village. With their hands raised above their eyes, some of the braves, so gifted with clear vision, were competing with each other to see which one of them would discover whether the oncoming party was friend or enemy.

I was sitting in our long house doing some intricate work on a wampum belt, which would be needed now to confirm the treaty, if there was one, when a cry which was so loud that it brought all the sleeping dogs to their feet, went up literally to split the hot afternoon air. It was our chiefs returning, and with them were three Blackrobes. My father had also sprung to his feet, and I saw him grow tense over the prospect of having to meet the Blackrobes and to welcome them into his village. "These French," he mut-

tered, "know how to strike a hard bargain. No good can come from this treaty." He tried hard to conceal his feelings from me as he pulled himself together, but I was always one to notice his every expression, and he knew this. Welcome them he would, but with a split tongue. Nevertheless, all our people heard his words, and they could hardly believe their ears.

Since the Blackrobes could not proceed on their journey it was a stroke of Divine Providence that they were given the honor of staying in the long house of my father. This displeased him but he could do nothing about it. It was then that the soul of my mother Kahenta seemed to assert itself in my soul. Never before had I experienced such inner joy, as I did when I was given the honor of mothering the Missionaries. That impression never left henceforth. It was so clearly written on my face that my father with quick words brought me back to reality by giving orders that I should make the Fathers comfortable. What he thought might be disagreeable to me, proved to be the most pleasant order he had ever given me. With the speed of a deer I got water and prepared for them a bowl of corn meal. By the little attentions which I bestowed upon the Fathers, I earned for myself many blessings, for they had the habit of making the sign of the cross very frequently towards anyone who was kind to them. I also had the opportunity of seeing the large crucifix which they wore around their necks. It was hard for me to take my eyes off the figure which was nailed to the Cross, and my curiosity grew from day to day, hoping that they would tell me something about the man on the Cross, and what He had to do with the heaven which the Blackrobes promised to us if we would give up our old ways, and give ourselves into the hands of the Raweniio.

As interested as I was, I did not dare to ask any questions since my father was watching me very closely. The next time I went out into the woods for firewood I took a knife along and cut a cross, like the one the Fathers wore, on a tree. I stood in front of it and made what must a very crude prayer, as only a twelve year old Indian girl would have made. Whenever I would have to go to the spring for water I made a habit of going to that tree where I had carved the cross. It seemed to make getting wood and water much easier, and I even think I must have gone for water and wood much more often than formerly. I think the Fathers used to pity me when they saw me carrying those bundles of wood and the big water jug, but it seemed to me that they suffered more than I did because of the squalid condition of things around our cabin. From their good manners I knew that they had given up everything near and dear to them to search for our people who were so hopelessly lost.

From what Father Fremin said to the people I judged that there must have been an awful lot of useless suffering. Our people made so many suffer foolishly. Without any reason worth mentioning they tortured their captives. I think it was mostly because the sorcerers taught them this so that they would have influence. Our people also suffered because they were too proud to let other tribes think that they were not war-like. So that is why they inflicted so much useless suffering.

I realized too that I had done much suffering, mostly on account of my weak and sickly health. I wondered if Raweniio (God) would still love me when He found out that I was so sickly. And, had not my mother died? Was she pleasing to Raweniio? My aunts told me how peacefully she had died. I believed that I

saw the reason for it when Father told us that we could have peace only if our souls were free from the crimes which were so common in our villages. There was a connection between what the Man of the Cross suffered and our sufferings. Later I learned that unless we suffer with Him we cannot come to His Heaven. So right then I decided that the thing for me to do was to make myself like Him by punishing myself whenever I was impatient and felt like pouting over the cross things that my aunts used to say to me or about me. I used to go out and kneel in the snow before the Cross on the tree, or dig in the snow for wood until my fingers lost their feeling.

I saw too what Father meant when he said that we could suffer for others, when one day I saw him trying to plead with a dying woman who had been scalped. He would not leave her but stayed with her and preached the salvation of Raweniiio to her until he prepared her for Baptism. From this I learned that I could also pray for the conversion of my people, which got to be my chief prayer whenever I went to the tree with the cross.

I met one or other of the Fathers rather frequently, but never dared to ask questions about the things that were running like squirrels through my mind, because I had to wait on account of the hatred of my father for the Blackrobes. There was nothing I would rather have done than throw myself at the feet of the Blackrobes and ask for the pouring of the waters, the same as my mother Kahenta had done. If I had appeared to go against my father's wishes, he might have taken up a hatchet against the Blackrobes. Then, too, I was naturally timid, so that I always stayed on the outside of the circle when the squaws would gather about Father Pierron.

5. The Test

AT THIS TIME Raweniiio was preparing a great trial for me. As was customary among the Indians, a great ado was made when a girl was about to pass from girlhood to womanhood. During the time when this was supposed to take place the sorcerers came and performed certain rites, and the girl had to live in retirement. I did not mind this since I had become accustomed to it; in fact I loved it. But the consequence was that when the rite was over, the question of marriage came to the fore.

I had always dreaded this day since I knew how my aunts were bent on just this. I often wondered how I would manage to evade their suggestions and their glances when they were scheming some way to trap me at unguarded moments when I least suspected it. I kept very busy, and it was not that my eyes met theirs, but I overheard many things which they said just loud enough for me to hear, even though they pretended that they did not want me to hear. All the while they were trying to entice one brave or another in our long house, to see if they could make a match. Something inside of me rebelled so deeply that I was dead set against any such thing. I also had learned some prayers to say when such occasions arose, and it must have been these that delivered me, try as hard as they would to cause me to weaken.

One of the Fathers was praying for me, because he had noticed how distasteful such things were to me. And he believed that it was the prayers of my good mother which were partly responsible for the strength which I showed; otherwise I might have given in



as so many of the others girls in our village did. Then, too, I made use of my big shawl, which just about covered me entirely, and this made me look like an old squaw. Whenever Karitha and Arosen dragged into our long house a would-be suitor, out came the shawl, and it protected me against his view. But I made sure to show my face since it was scarred from the effects of the smallpox. Karitha and Arosen would say: "Come, Tekakwitha, stand up and dance, the brave will forget the scars on your face." Then I would rise, and to the disgust of my aunts, I would run out of the lodge into the woods.

One time though, I got into real trouble with Karitha and Arosen on account of this habit of mine — running into the woods. The village was celebrating a victory over having captured some Mohicans who had molested our people. The captives were being led into the public square to be tortured and eventually killed. I ran into the woods because I could not watch these butcheries without becoming sick. From my place I saw that the Blackrobe was talking with the prisoners and trying to convert them, so that their last hours would belong to Raweniio. Some of our braves took deep offence at this and said that the Blackrobes loved their enemies too much. In fact the Blackrobe, by means of his earnest instruction was able to give them faith in Raweniio so that they marched to their tortures and death with such courage and joy after they had been baptised, that our warriors said that they lost all heart in proceeding with the torturing, since nothing impressed our people so much as bravery in the face of death. Some of them remembered how they had eaten the heart of Brebeuf after they had killed him, in order that they might acquire his courage.

I think I was sixteen when the tribes living in all the different castles came together for a big council. The three Fathers had been preparing for this big event by trying to give as much instruction as possible to our village. It seemed that the women were quite impressed with the Religion of the Whiteman, so much so that some of the braves said it was a "squaw religion". This was so mainly because the medicine men had more influence with the braves. There were several reasons for the council meeting, one of the chief being the election of new council men. Many, especially of the Mohawks, had been killed in the wars that they waged. All the tribes who lived in the Mohawk valley and who made up the Iroquois nation were present, and so there were quite a few Christians in the group. This gave the Missionaries a good opportunity of teaching about Raweniiio in public, since, if any of the pagans objected to the doctrine of the God of heaven and earth, the Christians would silence them.

When the Fathers spoke in public there were many things that they had to say about the evil practices which were so prevalent among our people. Dream dances during which they invoked Aireskoi (the Spirit of Evil), and superstitious use of invocations to cure ailments were among the things that were practiced the most. Then there was the tendency to drink to the Whiteman's firewater, and the excessive cruelty and murdering of captives. The Blackrobe called some of the beliefs of the sorcerers fables by which they deceived the people and caused them to commit all kinds of impurities, and to have so many wars.

When the Blackrobes were speaking they were frequently interrupted by the objections of the sor-

cerers, who saw that they were losing face. I was very glad to see this happen because I felt that once our people had heard the truth, they would also become Christians. From that time on there was a remarkable change in our village. Many began to speak openly to the Blackrobes. Regular classes were started especially when Father Boniface arrived in 1669 to replace Father Pierron. He told the people that if they would learn their prayers and songs well he would build a Mission church. He would call it St. Peter's chapel. Frequently he gathered the people on the very spot where he wished to build his church, and there he would teach them and practice their devotions with them, especially on Saturday evenings. He did this in order to get the people used to the idea of going to confession on Saturday night, and also because Saturday was a day especially dedicated to God's Mother. He had brought with him a statue of Notre Dame de Foy, which he would set out under a big tree and leave it there, so that all day Saturday the people could come and pray the rosary.

We noticed too that the Fathers would come out of their cabins at given times of the day to pray. We copied this and would go several times a day to the statue of Our Lady which had now been placed in the new chapel.

I must now speak at length about some of the things that my aunts said to me when they were coaxing me to get married. There were five years of almost constant nagging on this subject. I did not dare run away as there was no place to go. I was their little plaything to handle according to their whim, which at one time was sly deception, at another outright cruelty. For the most part they arranged circumstances so I would frequently fall, all unsuspecting, into traps

they laid for me. On numerous occasions they brought young braves to our long house when I was busily engaged in my weaving and introduced them to me.

I was so full of embarrassment when any talk of marriage was mentioned. They were never ashamed to do this regardless of how I felt. They saw that kindness got them nowhere, so they began to persecute me and make me their slave, and treated me evilly. This way of acting on their part did not please my father, so he often rebuked the women, and I became the subject of a family quarrel. Frequently, too, they dressed me up and said that there was going to be a feast. Then I would find out that their real purpose was to show me off to just another suitor. Afterward they treated me as though I were not normal, or as if I were the undutiful daughter of the Chief, my father, or as if I were a disgrace to them at the sight of all the other girls of my age, who already were married.

Anyone can see what a difficult time I had to preserve myself from their tricks, especially when a wrong move on my part would have been taken as a sign that I had accepted the warrior whom they brought into our cabin. Our people had a custom that if a young girl allowed a given young brave to sit down next to her without objecting to it, she was married to him. On such an occasion I jumped up and ran out of the cabin into my favorite woods and refused to come back until he had left. I was then subject to the most violent torrent of words they ever heaped upon me. But this treatment did come to an end, except for the torturing words which they did not spare me.



6. The Praying Castle

NEWS HAD GOT AROUND that there were many Indians being converted along the St. Lawrence River. In fact some of the Iroquois had taken refuge in a little village which was growing up, and this village was made up almost entirely of Christians. Several years previously one of our chiefs had disappeared, no one knew where. He had stumbled on to this new village and had embraced Christianity; all the more strange, since he had left our village over a quarrel because his wife had turned Christian. Now one day, we sighted a strange canoe coming up the river. It was the fugitive returning with wonderful tales about the "praying village" on the St. Lawrence, where men lived in peace in a semi-secluded manner of life. His words stirred some of our people so that they planned to go back with him. In my own heart there was nothing I would rather have done. My father became furious over the incident, but he could not prevent the plan from being carried out, as a great number of our converts did go to the St. Lawrence with the former chief.

At the time I was fighting off the suggestions of Karitha and Arosen, I was beginning to have a deep inner peace in that I was becoming more certain that my time for deliverance was not far off. In fact, everybody called me "The Christian" or "lazy Christian" even though I had not been baptised. I was not now afraid of telling them that I was under instruction and intended to become Christian. When in 1675 Father de Lambertville arrived at our village I instantly knew he was the priest who would pour the saving waters over my head. He began to watch my every action to

ascertain what I knew about God and Religion. I was able to unburden myself to him for the first time and to tell him of my trials and he could only say: "poor little girl." One year of instruction, he thought might be sufficient for me, but he wanted to be sure of my manner of life before he proceeded to baptism, because some of our people, who at first were thought to be firm Christians fell into their old habits of sin and disgraced the name of Christian.

At the same time Father taught me much about the doctrines of our faith. There was much that I had to learn by word of mouth, as I could not read. And Father seemed determined not to let me become only half-Catholic. I can honestly say that I clung with full sincerity to all that he taught me, and I tried to practice everything that he said a good Catholic must practice. I guess that I must have become rather odious to some of the boys who had tried to attract my attention. Anyway, one day when I was on my way to the chapel some of them banded together and threw rocks at me. I do not know where I got the strength to ignore them. But I pretended not to notice their efforts to kill me, and kept me right on my path. It was their last effort to deter me from my object, and it failed. I thought of Father Jogues who had braved the same ordeal, and with it he lost his life. I had suffered only a few bruises.

Our braves were anxious about the supply of meat. It seemed that each year the fox, the deer and the rabbit went farther away or they were becoming more scarce. We even heard that in some places where the Whiteman had come, these animals were shot for the mere sport of it. Each hunting season our braves and all the able-bodied men and women who could be

of any help went on the hunt. It sometimes happened that one or the other small party might become separated and wander into one of the Whiteman's towns and procure firewater, the scourge of our people.

There were also many other bad practices especially the one of exchanging wives. Our people had many quarrels on account of this practice, and often it led to the most hateful consequences. The missionaries showed great anger when they preached to our people about this custom which had become so deeply rooted among us. They said it was one of the worst sins people could commit.

I mention this now since on the hunting trip in which we were engaged something happened which showed me that I had to be very careful in what I said and did. Karitha also came to the hunt, chiefly I guess because she wanted to watch and judge my least words and actions. Her jealousy over the gentle way my father treated me added always new fuel to the fire which burned within her. My father was a rough man and could be very cruel, but he did care how I was treated, and I had in return the affection of a daughter for a good father. I saw that Karitha's hatred for me grew worse from day to day. She harbored something within her which finally came to a head one day after the hunting party was over. She made a direct attack on that in me which I esteemed the highest—my purity. She did not come out with it to me or my father, but, what was the hardest to bear, she went to Father de Lambertville and tried to poison his mind with her suspicion. She told him that there were improper relations between me and her husband (my father) on the hunting trip. She based this charge on the way I addressed my father on one occasion.

Father de Lambertville was not quick to act, but I could tell from the way he acted that something very heavy was burdening his mind, and after all, how could he be sure, since the wife of the Chief made the report? Perhaps he had formed too high an opinion of me, or perhaps I did weaken. He thought that even those who were considered virtuous were known to have fallen into sin. And, these children of the forest, how far could anyone trust their attachment to the Commandments of God, when they had only recently heard about them?

One day Father stopped me after Mass and said that he wanted to ask me a question. I had prayed over it much and was relieved when he said: "My child, did you commit this sin?" I was ready with my answer: "Father, I have never committed this sin. I hate it very much. You have told me about Lucy, Cecilia and Agnes. I have them for my sisters, and I wished always to remain so." Father went back to his prayers, and I could see he was moved at what I said, and believed me.



7. *My Happiest Day*

IT WAS APRIL in 1676 and the ice on the Mohawk river had cracked and floated in big cakes down stream. The sun had already worked its magic on the willows and maples and made them look like brides. The squirrels were sweeping the nut shells out of the holes where they had hidden them. All things looked new in the April slant of the sun. Yes, life was to be renewed, especially in me who was about to feel the Waters of Redemption flow over my head in holy Baptism. The words that Father de Lambertville spoke burned like coals on my heart. "Kateri, what do you seek?" "Faith," I answered. "What does faith lead thee to?" "Life everlasting." Yes, I wanted that very much, this life of Christ in me. "Do you renounce Satan?" "Do you believe?" These questions received the answer which sprang from the deepest part of my soul. I still thrill with joy when I think of how conscious I was of the chains of Satan falling off me.

I had often drawn water from the fresh spring that was in the ravine, but never had I thought of any water that was so refreshing as the Water which Father poured over my head as he said my new name: "Kateri, I baptise thee." As he placed the white garment upon me, I prayed that its pure whiteness would always be reflected in my soul. I wanted this always, more than anything in this life. I would rather give up my life than lose grace for a single moment.

From all that happened Father de Lambertville felt that I could never have any peace as long as I stayed with my people and he spoke to me about it one day. Where could I go? Who would take me? I felt



I AM INDIAN

that it was hopeless, so I did not make any pretence at keeping it in my mind. After all, I had already received so much from Raweniio, I could not ask for more. The sacred waters of Baptism had flowed over my head only a few months ago on that beautiful Easter morning April 5th, 1676. I was now twenty and felt that with God's graces I could hold out against anything my aunts said or did.

But, contrary to what I could have anticipated, my deliverance was close at hand. Father de Lambertville had written to Father Cholenec who was in charge of St. Francis Xavier Mission at Caughnawaga on the banks of the St. Lawrence, and told him that he wished me to come to his "praying castle" as soon as possible. My sister Ennita (whom my father had adopted) and my friend Anastasia had taken refuge there some years ago when so many other Christians left our village. They were eagerly awaiting my arrival. So it was not surprising that three braves took to the woods and lakes to come after me. This was in 1677 about a year after my baptism.

Hot Powder was the Indian whom Father Cholenec chose for the trip. He and Ennita's husband and a good Huron landed their canoe at St. Peter's Mission on the Mohawk river and Father de Lambertville saw that the time had come, since my father was away. The trip was not very hard for me because I was used to the ways of the river and the forest which spoke to me only of the immensity of God and of His beautiful things. The great maple and pine trees along the shores of the lakes and rivers whispered a peace into my soul that had never been there before. Hot Powder, being a good huntsman knew how to shield me from any danger, and I was in danger as I discovered, for

my father had set out in angry pursuit of us, but to no avail.

The peace that stole over my soul while on the lakes on the journey stayed with me for the rest of my life; in fact it seemed to grow more and more as I came closer to God and the day of my First Holy Communion, which was on Christmas of 1677. I thought back on Christmas when Father Boniface had made our first crib for us in St. Peter's chapel. Everyone, even the pagans came to see it. Now, surrounded by my dearest friends who were all Christians, I made a crib out of my heart as I welcomed my Lord and Master for the first time during that midnight Mass.

My sister Ennita and Anastasia often spoke to me about the wonders of the life surrounding the Mission, and now it was my privilege to enjoy it to the full. Early in the morning we were present for the first Mass of the day, and nothing on earth could have caused me to miss those moments of peace and joy.

There were many things we had to talk about during those first months and we even engaged in the ordinary chatter common among women as our busy fingers flew over a piece of beadwork.

Anastasia and Ennita were both anxious to know what my plans for the future were. They encouraged me to look around for a good Christian brave. They did not insist at first, but seemed anxious about me because a squaw that had no brave was not shielded against the poverty that was always so close to us, even here at St. Francis Xavier Mission. I did not have fear of poverty, since my needlework would provide for me whatever was necessary. Besides, I did not make any of the fancy beadwork for myself, because I had learned that to wear them was nothing but vani-

ty. I used only the simplest clothing to keep me warm, and I had a beautiful new blue shawl which I wore when I went to the Mission church.



8. "I Vow To Thee"

EVEN MY CLOSEST FRIENDS did not as yet understand anything of the determination that I had, of always remaining close to God without letting any earthly lover to come between. Father Cholenec had heard of my determination, and at first he thought it might have sprung from a kind of first fervor because he was almost afraid to think of his "little savage saint" making such a step when the very idea of it had hardly been heard of among the Iroquois, much less the Mohawks. He did not try to persuade me to drop my intention and only asked me to pray fervently for a while; but I could not stand the suspense. I went to Father Cholenec and told him that there was no use waiting, since I knew what it was and had determined to lead a life as close as possible to that of the Blessed Virgin. Father was also able to quiet the two women, telling them they should stop insisting upon my getting married, and they felt ashamed of themselves. He told them what an honor it was for their race that God had chosen one of them to lead such a life in the face of the barbarity that had been practiced up until so recently.



I AM INDIAN

It was 1679 and the ice and snow of winter was upon us. It was time for our winter hunt. Father Cholenec would have allowed me to stay behind, because I told him I could not be close to the Mass and Holy Communion on the hunt, but I could see that he thought it best that I go, so I did.

I hesitate to speak about this phase of my Christian life because only a few people knew about it at the time. It is the penances I practiced. Father Cholenec was my spiritual director and he allowed me to practice certain penances together with a very pious woman Marie Therese who was quite a bit older than I and had been a Christian for many years. We kept no secrets from one another, and often talked about the things of God at great lengths. We had been filled with the thought of our own sins and the many sins of our people when they practiced such terrible cruelties on their captives. So we began to practice the penance of whipping each other with our shoulders laid bare. We thought of how our people had put those innocent Jesuit priests to death. We knew these injustices had to be atoned for, so that God would find among our people a likeness to His Crucified Son. I myself thought of how cowardly I was when I lived among the Mohawks in so long delaying my baptism and in not being willing to suffer martyrdom for embracing Christ. I felt that the harm that I did may have kept many of my people from becoming Christians. I was sorry for these faults and wanted to make up for them. It may have looked foolish to stand in the snow waist deep, or to wade in icy water, or to cut my feet on sharp pieces of ice, or to brand my feet with hot irons, but were not these the things our people inflicted upon their captives? The spikes I wore around my waist were as nothing when compared with the tor-

tures to which we subjected our innocent captives. And what were they in comparison with the crown of thorns our Saviour wore, or the nails that pierced His hands and feet? Was He not scourged for our sins? We had so little to give to God and we had received so much.

The morning of March 25, 1679, the Feast of the Annunciation, was beginning like any other early Spring morning along the St. Lawrence River, yet it was like no other morning for me. Like that great Lady, the Mother of God who had sung out her total dedication to the divine Will, I was allowed to kneel at her altar and make my perpetual vow of chastity. I think I clearly understood what it meant; it was not something that was being taken away from me but rather something new added. I was to become thereby a tool totally in the hands of God. He was to use me as a tool for his own purposes. I understood that to be like Mary too meant more than wearing a blue shawl; it meant that henceforth nothing of Kateri would remain, and all of her would be God's. All that I had done until then was as nothing when compared with what God would do now through me. In fact the entire village seemed to sense a closeness to God, not because of me so much as because of what God was doing through me. Father Cholenec had said that it would bring new fervor to the whole village. Through my vow, I felt that something would come into many of my people, as proved to be the fact. I hoped too that through me the grace of God would work in many of our Indian maidens and cause them to see the vanity of all things outside of God, and that my dedication to God would in some measure offer atonement to God for all the crimes my pagan people had committed against God.

About the beginning of Lent, 1680 I became very ill and was somewhat tormented also by the thought that perhaps some of the things I had done for penance may have caused it. Still, I did only whatever I was allowed to do by Father Cholenec. A great fever seemed to come over me and I was restless. I could no longer perform my usual work. So many people came into my cabin, mothers brought their little ones for me to touch and I prayed that if it were God's holy Will to die, I would be ready cheerfully to heed His call.

Many wonderful things were taking place in the village. God allowed me to see into people's souls. I saw clearly how dear some of them were before God and told them so. The thought of death did not make me sad; I thought of it as I would have of a great feast. In fact God made it known to me that I would not be here on earth to celebrate the two great feasts which were always my favorite ones, Holy Thursday and Good Friday. He was to take me to Himself before that. The last thing I remember are the words I forced myself to say to my dear friend, Marie Therese: "Take courage, never give up mortification. I will love you in heaven. I will pray for you. I will assist you."



After Death

The women who had gone into the woods returned just in time to witness a scene so beautiful that they never forgot it. As the Fathers were saying the prayers for the dying, Kateri's face became so radiant that all were astonished. The official documents

say that a quarter of an hour after her death, Kateri's face radiated a heavenly beauty and even the marks which all her life had disfigured her face completely disappeared. God allowed her inner beauty of her soul to possess her entire being so that everyone came and kissed her hands and prayed by her side, and treasured everything she had touched. Thus God deigned to show her people what blessings come upon those who pay the price of suffering.

Kateri Tekakwitha's blessing would be upon Caughnawaga for all time. Her little village is further blessed by having the earthly remains of this child of the forest sealed by the Church, awaiting the RESURRECTION, and who knows, awaiting the breaking of the seals which will place her on the Altars of her native land, a reward of the chaste life that she led in those primitive times from 1656-1680.

Meaning for Today

IN OUR DAY what could be the message of this dear little American Indian girl, except for a voice recalling us to a sense of moral value? In all fields of life conscience is no longer the deciding factor. The Commandments seem unnecessary barriers in the way of a pleasure-seeking generation. Escape from authority and restraint tempts its clients into thinking that it gives liberty. Penance is laughed at as though it were old-fashioned. Look at the heart of this simple child of God, Kateri. Are you not ashamed that this primitive soul surpasses you with the speed of a fox? But is she "primitive"? Yes, like the martyrs who went straight to Christ, like the early Christians, who, when they found martyrdom no long-

er possible, fled to the desert, there to seek Christ. You might ask, are these things necessary in our enlightened age? Her enlightenment was true wisdom. She saw sin; she saw the Crucifixion. She placed herself directly between them and embraced the cross. There is a necessity for all of us to do the same, lest we be found to embrace our worst enemy, sin.





Prayer

O GOD, Who didst wondrously protect the innocence of Thy Servant Catherine Tekakwitha, and bestow on her the gift of faith and the spirit of penance, grant, I beseech Thee, that all who invoke her intercession may obtain what they desire, and I also the blessing I humbly beg; so that her favor with Thee may be manifest to all, and she may be exalted to the honor of our altars, as among the Blessed in Heaven. Amen.

IMPRIMATUR: † FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN

Her Cause

THE ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884) petitioned the Holy See to institute the process for the beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha.

THE CAUSE was instituted by the Most Reverend Edmund F. Gibbons, Bishop of Albany, New York on May 22, 1931. The Informative Process was opened June 2, 1931, reports and reviews concluded and the Process finished June 4, 1932. On June 29, 1932 the Process (de non cultu) was instituted and a solemn visit was made to Kateri's tomb on July 21, 1932.

THE CONGREGATION OF RITES, Historical Section, in June 1938, approved as complete, genuine and trustworthy the documents pertaining to Kateri and that they established her renown for holiness, and a solid basis for final judgment that her virtues were heroic.

HIS HOLINESS, POPE PIUS XII on May 2, 1939, approved of the Introduction of the Cause of Kateri Tekakwitha. And on November 26, 1940 the discussions of the virtues of the Servant of God were begun.

AT ROME, January 3, 1943 was issued the Decree approved by His Holiness Pius XII declaring heroic the virtues of the Servant of God, the Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha.

SINCE THE DECREE terming Kateri's virtues heroic and allowing her to be called "Venerable", a constant search for miracles attributable to her intercession has been continued. Several Processes

I AM INDIAN

(Apostolic) concerned with purported miracles have been concluded or are presently in progress. The business of these Processes is simply to take testimony under oath. The judgment rests with the Holy See.

IF YOU have reason to think that after having prayed to God through the intercession of Kateri for help in a definite case, divine intervention has taken place, write to the author of this booklet or to the Vice-Postulator of Her Cause:

in the United States:

Rev. Thomas J. Coffey, S.J.
30 West 16th Street
New York 11, New York

in Canada:

Rev. Henri Bechard, S. J.
St. Francis Xavier Mission
Caughnawaga, P. Q., Canada



The entire proceeds from the distribution of this booklet will be used to help care for the 450 Indian boys and girls and the 35 orphans who are being educated by charity at St. Paul's Indian Mission. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

Father Gualbert, O.S.B.
St. Paul's Indian Mission
Marty, South Dakota

