

MIRACLE of the MOHAWKS

by
Marion Bailey Stephenson

Pageant Press, Inc.
New York

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 64-16414
Copyright © by Marion Bailey Stephenson
All Rights Reserved

First Edition

Published by Pageant Press, Inc.
101 Fifth Avenue, New York 3, New York

Manufactured in the United States of America



Kateri Tekakwitha

St. Kateri Tekakwitha

The Lily of the Mohawks

"Her life itself is a miracle."

Pope Pius XI

"I acknowledge my indebtedness to the Reverend Thomas J. Coffey, S. J. for his critical appraisal of this manuscript."

M.B.S.

PREFACE

—for Katherine, who was born 290 years later—

One could well say that Katherine Tekakwitha never had a chance. She was born in 1656 into a world where violence and cruelty were commonplace, and where the struggle for existence itself took precedence over all other considerations. Her childhood—if she can be said to have had one at all—was marked by suffering and deprivation. Orphaned at four, she was left scarred by the disease that had killed her mother. She knew few comforts, experienced little love.

At the age when you, dear Katherine, were trotting off to kindergarten, Kateri knew the dawn to sunset meaning of hard physical labor. But at the age when you are rightly beginning to ask yourself "What shall I be?," the child who never had a chance had already transcended the limitations not only of her particular world but of this larger world in which you and I, like Kateri Tekakwitha, must all find our meaning.

Bitter as the circumstances of Kateri's life may seem in comparison with our own, the interest of her story does

not lie in historical and sociological contrasts. These provide simply the background against which a more significant difference emerges: Kateri's own courage to be different. For her, the courage involved was enormous. For all of us, in any time, the challenge is there to be met when we are ready to see it. Today's teen-agers may not face choices as stern or dramatic as did Kateri Tekakwitha at the age of 16, yet, which of you will not need to find out for yourselves when to be different and how?

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vii
I Tekakwitha at Gandawague	1
II An Awakening	8
III An Indignant Visitor	15
IV Spring's Promise	19
V Baptism	24
VI Kateri Tekakwitha on Trial	28
VII Flight to Canada	32
VIII Christmas Day	40
IX The Hunt	45
X A Time of Rejoicing	50
XI A Holy Alliance	55
XII A Trip to Montreal	61
XIII Another Blast	67
XIV The Vow	74
XV Heroic Courage	79
XVI Eternal Journey	85
XVII Miracle Worker	91
<i>To Katherine</i>	96

MIRACLE of the MOHAWKS

Chapter I

TEKAKWITHA AT GANDAWAGUE

The town is now known as Auriesville, New York. There are stores and houses there, of course, where once the forest covered all. But it is Mohawk country still, and memories of the Indian past are intimately interwoven with the facts of the present in this town on the south bank of the Mohawk River. Dig beneath the ground, and you may still uncover a fragment of pottery or an Iroquois arrowhead. Beyond the town itself, that fine old beech perhaps—or that massive oak—may have been a young tree when the Turtles fled from Ossernenon.

Ossernenon was the name of the triple palisaded village occupied by the Turtle clan of the Mohawk Indians. The Mohawks, one of the "Five Nations" of Indians who dominated central New York State, were divided into three major clans: the Turtle, the Bear, and the Wolf. Their reputation for fierceness and cruelty was unmatched by any of the Iroquois tribes.

"Running the gantlet" is today a figure of speech.

In Ossernenon, in the 17th century, it was a savage and all too common sport. Captives of the Mohawks were forced to run between two lines of women and children armed with stone-filled leather bags and whips. If the victim fell from exhaustion, he was considered unworthy to be saved, and was immediately tortured and burned; but he who survived the cruel ordeal was treated with kindness by his adopted family.

Of all the grim memories that haunt the erstwhile village of Ossernenon, however, none is more poignant than the fate of two Jesuit priests, Saint Rene Goupil and Saint Isaac Jogues, and the companion of Father Jogues, Saint John de Lande. These missionaries, who had dedicated their lives to bringing the benign influence of the Christian faith to the merciless Mohawks, had at first been accepted with some degree of tolerance by the Indians. Then, after an epidemic had ravaged the village, the Mohawks became obsessed by primitive superstitions. The "Blackrobes," as they called the Jesuits, must be to blame. How else to account for this calamity?

First, Father Goupil was tomahawked, scalped, and his body tossed into the river. Then a few years later, Father Jogues and John de Lande were victims. In wild triumph, the warriors speared the two heads on the spikes of the palisades.

A bloody past, a bloody beginning. For it was a beginning. In the ground stained by the blood of martyrs—so goes an old and honorable belief—is sown the seed of Christians.

It cannot have been far from the spot of the shameful massacre that Kateri Tekakwitha was born in 1656. She was the child of two people who must have been as different in nature as they were in background. Her father, a chief of the Turtle clan, was a natural heir to the pride

and ferocity of his race. Her mother, of whom we could wish to know more, just as Kateri must have yearned that she could have known her at all, was an Algonquin who had been taken captive by the Turtles, then married to their chief. She was, we know, a Christian convert, before there were many such among the Indians. The attitude toward Christianity among the Turtles themselves wavered between indifference and hostility.

Four years after Kateri's birth, one of the frightening plagues that so frequently beset the unsanitary and crowded dwelling places of the Indians, attacked the village of Ossernenon. Kateri's mother, father, and baby brother died, and the smallpox which took their lives left the four year old girl with a scarred face and poor eyesight.

The contaminated village was hastily abandoned by the Turtles who were still living. Travelling about a mile farther west, they established a new village in the angle between Auries Creek and the Mohawk River. The missionaries gave it the name of "Gandawague" meaning "The Rapids."

Indian children were not given names at birth. This came later, when the little one had developed enough to show some definite characteristics from which a name could be derived. By the time Kateri had moved with her kinfolk to Gandawague she had earned the name of "Tekakwitha," which means "one who puts things in order." Kateri, the Indian equivalent of Katherine, was to be a later, Christian addition to her Indian inheritance.

If Kateri did indeed have the ability to put things in order at this early age, she must have acquired it under the most trying circumstances. The life of a woman was never an easy one in a Mohawk village, and young as Kateri was, her life as a woman began in Gandawague.

To the Mohawks, as indeed to all nations, a woman was not only a highly useful member of the tribe, but as highly respected as well. They were the rulers of the home and many played important roles in society. When Tekakwitha's uncle, the new chief of the Turtles, agreed to adopt the small orphan, he acquired a new servant whom he could well use. His wife and her sister, the only other two women in the chief's family, were no longer young, and there was much work to be done.

The basic units of the village of Gandawague were the twenty-five-odd longhouses, which depending upon their length, housed as many as ten to twenty families who shared the several hearthfires inside. They must have been depressing places, these longhouses. Dark, badly ventilated, and crowded, Kateri's home afforded little comfort to the body or spirit. When winter came, the bark doors were closed and hung with bearskins. The long room grew hazy from smoking hearth-fires, and Tekakwitha's fever-weakened eyes watered and stung. The many odors, always present, took on new intensity. There was the smell of cooking, the smell of animals, the smell of people. Above all, there was the smell of the butchered carcasses that hung from the rafters.

The freshness of the air outside and the beauties of trees and water must have been a welcome change from the confinement of the cabin. Yet, the outdoors held its own discomforts for Tekakwitha. Her eyes were sensitive to sunlight as well as to smoke. When she gathered firewood, carried water from the spring, or worked in the fields, she had to cover her eyes with the red blanket she carried with her.

Inside or out, she did her work well. The aunts, as older Indian women were called by custom, were soon impressed by her mastery of the various domestic duties.

She learned to weave, to sew, to embroider, to cook. And her chieftain uncle regarded these signs of industry with satisfaction. He began to see in Tekakwitha not only a sustaining member of his own household, but a woman whose accomplishments would attract a fine husband. The husband, by Indian custom, must be of a different clan and make his home in the wife's cabin, so Kateri's uncle could look forward to adding a hunter and a warrior to the family ranks.

At the age of eight, Tekakwitha was promised in marriage to a little boy whom her aunts had chosen. The practice was formal and traditional. There was no immediate involvement, and it is probable that Kateri herself was hardly aware of the event. For the oldsters, however, the ritual of engagement boded favorably and hopefully for the future.

The present itself, for Tekakwitha, involved many observations and experiences which we can only try to imagine. Certainly the hardships of her life were not altogether unrelieved. There must have been good and quiet times when Kateri looked up from her work to smile at what she saw around her. An old warrior, perhaps, would be sitting on the lower bunk of his two-tiered compartment, stringing a snowshoe or carving the figure of a wolf on the back of a comb. Nearby, a matron would rhythmically stir the contents in one of five kettles over as many fires spaced down the long corridor. Girls, seated on the rush-matted earthen floor, would talk lightly as girls will, while they wove strips of black ash into baskets or dyed the moose hair or porcupine quills that would be used in weaving and decorating belts and garments. Then the low tempo of the scene would be punctuated by the cries of children, romping through the longhouse with flea-infested dogs close to their heels.

Did Tekakwitha join the gossiping girls in discussions of dress and fine young braves? She must have, upon occasion. Companionship is welcome at any age, and Kateri, though never minding solitude, never scorned people who were part of her life. The respects in which she was different from all the rest had yet to be called into full development. That restless and seeking part of her nature which yearned beyond what she found around her was still something she did not fully understand herself; the other members of the longhouse could not have been expected to receive it.

Dress is a topic of interest for all young girls. For the girls at Gandawague, it must have been a particularly absorbing concern. An Indian woman, in full dress, was a walking testament to the artistic inclinations of her people, as well as to their industry and inventiveness. First, there were the red cheeks, colored by dye that had been carefully prepared from perhaps powdered red stone mixed with grease. The shell earrings that dangled from pierced ears, the beads and bangles that covered arms and neck, were the results of painstaking craftsmanship. Untold hours of work, and who knows what otherwise stifled impulses toward beauty, went into the construction of a fringed tunic or wrap-around deerskin skirt. These garments were often decorated with floral designs worked in dyed moose hair or porcupine quills. The beautiful colored beads that embroidered the leggings had no doubt been hard earned by Kateri's uncle, who bargained beaver pelts for them with the neighboring Dutch. Even the moccasins were not merely utilitarian coverings, but were delicately ornamented in perhaps a fern-leaf pattern or geometrical designs.

It is easy to understand why dress should have been a matter of such importance to the Mohawks. In a society

whose major concerns were bare survival and frequent warfare, dress became the expression of many unrealized aspirations. And nowhere were fine garments more appreciated than at the Seasonal Dances and Feasts. If Kateri Tekakwitha was later to regret that she had ever let herself be dressed in the handsome clothes her aunts provided, it was because her aspirations had then taken on form and direction well beyond anything her Gandawague kinsmen were ready or able to conceive.

Though dress was an indulgence, it was a rare one, and peripheral to her daily life. As summer changed to autumn, and as winter drew near, many hours of Kateri's day were spent in necessary chores. She held a clay jug to the spring, filling it with water that would be used for eating and drinking; she gathered wood for the hearth-fire, returning to the longhouse bent under the weight of the bundle across her shoulders. Rain seeped into her moccasins, then snow crowded into the bottom of her leggings. But Kateri Tekakwitha walked in fortitude and waited in hope—for something she did not yet know how to name.

Chapter II

AN AWAKENING

There was never more than an uneasy peace between the Iroquois Indians and the French posts along the St. Lawrence River. Treaties had little meaning, and were often broken at a moment's notice by sudden Indian raids. "They approach like foxes," one Jesuit wrote, "attack like lions, disappear like birds." *

The ire of the French was aroused not only by the damage suffered during the attacks, but by the savage treatment which the Indians accorded to the prisoners they bore back with them. The Mohawks especially were infamous for their violence. In 1666, the French determined that these troublesome redskins should once and for all be crushed.

Tekakwitha was ten years old when General de Tracy

* Francis Parkman: OLD REGIME IN CANADA, Little, Brown and Company, p. 34.

left Quebec to march upon the Mohawk Valley. He brought with him four priests, more than a thousand French Canadian soldiers, and about one hundred Algonquin and Huron Indians.

De Tracy's army made rapid progress. The inhabitants of Gandawague, taken by surprise, had no time to protect themselves against the invaders. Quickly, they gathered together what food, blankets, and household effects they could carry, and fled westward on snowshoes to Tionnontogen.

Tionnontogen was the capital village (also referred to as castle) of the Mohawks, a triple palisaded castle of the Wolf clan. Here the Turtles hoped to find protection and support. The Bears, the third of the Mohawk clans, also fled to Tionnontogen, abandoning their own village of Andagaron which lay between those of the Turtles and the Wolves.

Soon the nearby woods were shattered by the boom of de Tracy's cannon. Women and children—Tekakwitha must have been among them—fled the castle to seek cover among the trees and brush. The warriors of the three clans remained to defend the village. But it was soon clear that Indian arrows and bullets acquired from the Dutch were no match for de Tracy's heavy arms. The warriors were forced to flee and join their families in hiding.

De Tracy's men moved in on Tionnontogen to lay it waste, as they had already laid waste the villages of the Turtles and the Bears. The castle was burned, and not only the castle, but the fields of corn and the stores of food. The Mohawks had been crushed indeed.

The Turtles, the Bears, and the Wolves staggered back to the ruins of their respective villages to face inconceivable hardships. Cold and hunger were constant

companions as they struggled to build temporary huts and forage for food.

There were many who did not survive that cruel winter. Tekakwitha did, at the cost of what suffering we can imagine. Certainly there were many times when she was hungry, and there was little time for the more congenial domestic duties she had mastered so well. Most of her waking hours were no doubt spent in the unending search for roots, berries, nuts—anything the woods might provide to stave off starvation.

In the following spring, a sobered group of Mohawk deputies journeyed to Quebec. There they made a treaty of peace with the French which was to last for eighteen years. They were not alone. The remaining Nations of the Five, the Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas, likewise made peace with the Canadian settlers.

Then began the long spring and summer's work of building new bark houses. The Turtles reestablished their village on the north side of the Mohawk River. Situated on a high plateau west of the junction of the Mohawk River and Cayudutta Creek near the present site of Fonda, N.Y., the new location was strongly fortified. Like "Gandawague," the new village name of Caughnawaga meant "the Rapids"—in this case, the reference being to the rushing waters of Cayudutta Creek.

The Mohawk deputies who had gone to Quebec had not come home alone. As a gesture of good faith toward the French, they had agreed to bring three Jesuit priests back with them to preach among the Mohawks. Ordinarily, Fathers Fremin, Bruyas, and Pierron would have received their first welcome from the Indians at the principal village of Tionnontogen. As it happened, they arrived first at the village of the Turtles, where they were

guests in the cabin of Tekakwitha's uncle. The priests were guests of the Turtles for only three days, but during this time, Tekakwitha had ample chance to observe these people from a world so different from her own. It was she who attended to their needs, prepared their food and served it—noted the delicacy with which they ate, the gentleness of manner to her, a young girl.

We know from the reports of those who have written about Tekakwitha's life that she was deeply and favorably impressed by the visit of the Blackrobes. We would not have to be told, however, that she was predisposed to an attraction for what they represented. First of all, she knew that her own mother had been a Christian—enough in itself to pique her curiosity. Moreover, she was a child who had suffered and who had the intelligence and sensitivity to reflect upon her experience. Finally, she was a child who had done all things well to the best of her ability, yet who had still not found the kind of insight or accomplishment that satisfied her deepest needs. Here, in three dedicated exemplars of the Christian religion, she was exposed to a possible answer to the unnamed desires that were an integral part of her own nature.

The Jesuits were equally aware of Tekakwitha. They watched her as she laid the fire, ground the corn between stones, and prepared soup and bread. They saw her, pottery jug in hand, descend the steep path leading to the spring which was later known as "Tekakwitha's Spring." They heard her laughing there, as she stood in line with other girls on the same errand. And they perceived that she was different from the other girls. There was an eagerness in her manner, and a corresponding quickness to understand.

Father Cholenec, another Jesuit priest who later became associated with Tekakwitha, recalls this period in his biography of her:

"The modesty and sweetness with which she acquitted herself of her duty to them touched her new guests, while on their part she was struck with their affable manners, their regularity in prayer, and the other exercises into which they divided their day. God even then disposed her to the grace of Baptism, for which she would have asked, if the missionaries had remained longer in her village." **

The arrival of the Jesuits did not mark the beginning of Kateri's spiritual development; it did give it new focus. Still only eleven years old, she began to suspect that there might be new answers to concerns that had long occupied her thoughts. What she had seen in the behavior among the older Indians had been confusing and puzzling. To the primitive Indian, nothing existed, be it a human being or a work of nature; animate or inanimate, that was not endowed with a secret power—a power used for good or evil. But what kind of spirit was it that seemed to sanction the cruelty of the Indian braves who took such delight in torturing their prisoners? What kind of spirit was it that found expression in the pagan practices of the medicine man; the frenzied dream-feasts that transformed the town into wild uproar and confusion? Why, finally, did her uncle and the other Turtles so mistrust the Christian missionaries whose only purpose

** Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, Document XII:p. 345.

seemed to be to share the message of a better kind of life?

As she pondered these dilemmas, Kateri began to realize what it must have meant to captive Algonquin and Huron Indians to be thwarted in the worship of the Christian God once they had fallen into the hands of the Mohawks. And she could sympathize with the Indian converts who left their tribes to migrate to the Iroquois Mission at La Prairie in Canada. At the same time, she understood her uncle's fear of what all of this meant: unrest and loss of many of his people. The white man's cannon and his encroachment upon Indian territory were dangers that the red man could at least resist through warfare, but the white man's religion was a more subtle and powerful enemy.

One of the three priests, Father Pierron, returned to Caughnawaga as Christian minister to the Turtles. He came neither welcome nor unwelcome. Kateri's uncle, along with the more influential members of the tribe, regarded his presence as a necessary evil; his religion as a white man's folly. But the memories of the Mohawk's bitter defeat of the winter before were still fresh; toleration of the Blackrobe was the price of peace.

Father Pierron quietly proceeded to establish his mission. He built a small bark chapel, and dedicated it to St. Peter. Then, although he was unable to speak the Iroquois language, he found his own methods of instructing the Indian people in the Gospel. A talented painter, he made pictures on bark that gave literal meanings to abstract ideas. He invented games, the playing of which helped to point out religious principles.

In the meantime, Kateri's uncle's attitude toward Christianity turned from sullen suspicion to more positive

hostility. It was one thing to recognize the threat of the white man's religion from afar; it was quite another thing to witness Father Pierron's effective teaching in the midst of his own village. Nor did his attitude change when Father Boniface arrived at Caughnawaga to replace Father Pierron as the missionary there. He was simply more of the same.

Kateri watched on the sidelines as first Father Pierron, then Father Boniface, drew many of the villagers into their flock. She did not take part in the chanting of hymns, the prayers, and the rituals which expressed the meaning of the Christian faith. For this would have been more than her uncle could support. It was something that had to be borne if others wished to listen to the Jesuit. He would not permit it of the adopted daughter who shared the chief's own hearthfire.

Nevertheless, Tekakwitha watched and listened. God seemed to become more meaningful to her when she listened to the choir of Indian children chanting the Te Deum. The Infant Jesus seemed indeed present in the Mohawk Valley when His carved figure lay on a bed of moss in the small bark chapel at Christmas time. The chapel's cross, its Christmas decoration of pine bough, candles, and banners, attracted her eye and spoke to her spirit.

A seed had been sown in winter earth. The growth and the harvest lay ahead.

Chapter III

THE INDIGNANT VISITOR

Kateri's aunts were pleased with the girl's needle-work. Her early promise had developed into a talent that attracted general admiration. Even matrons and maidens from other lodges than her own would gather around to watch Kateri as she sewed. Using a needle from the small bone of a deer's ankle and threaded with deer sinew, she embroidered intricate designs in colored beads or dyed porcupine quills or dyed moose hair on clothing for her aunts. Or perhaps she embroidered tobacco pouches for the braves, or carved the footboard of a baby-frame. Equally skilled at weaving, she made handsome mats and burden-straps.

When it came to her own clothing, Kateri was less willing to indulge in the arts of decoration that she shared so willingly with others. The modesty so long evident in her manners and conduct seemed to make her hold back in the matter of her own dress. The fringes on her overblouse were restrained; the decorations on her moc-casins were almost severely simple.

The aunts decided that enough was enough. They could respect even Kateri for her quiet ways and her unassuming diligence; but dress was a matter of great importance, too great to allow Tekakwitha to have her own humble way about it. It was an advertisement, as nothing else could be, of her worthiness to wed the best of the braves. And so, joking, cajoling, but insistent, they occasionally persuaded Tekakwitha to let them drape her with the elaborate necklaces, bracelets, and earrings which befitted her station.

"Tell me now, isn't there some nice young boy you really like? Didn't you see—oh, I saw it all right!—how that fine brave from the next village watched you last night from his place beside the fire?" There is an age-old way of teasing young girls who are trembling on the brink of womanhood, and we may be sure that the aunts left none of the timeless tricks untried. Did Kateri seem reluctant? If so, it could be nothing of great consequence. All virgins were shy about the subject of men; if Kateri did not giggle like the rest of them when she was teased, well, that was Tekakwitha for you. When the time came, she would be ready enough. After all, she had always been an obedient child.

But Kateri's previous obedience had been misleading. Her eagerness to please, her willingness to sacrifice her own inclinations in order to accommodate others, were not the product of weakness but an inner strength of her own. Now that strength was to assert itself in open defiance.

Kateri had borne patiently with the constant teasing, the talk of marriage, the lectures on her responsibility to the family. But while the talk went on, her resistance grew. The idea of marriage was not interesting to her

for some reason she did not yet fully understand. Finally, she informed the aunts that such talk displeased her and she wished to hear no more about it.

The aunts were temporarily silenced. Such firmness was more than they had anticipated. It was clear that they could no longer argue with Tekakwitha; they would simply have to find a way of getting around her.

One afternoon, Tekakwitha returned to the lodge from her chores to find that she was expected to dress up for the evening. The aunts had already assembled a collection of beads, earrings, and bracelets which were ready for her to put on. If Kateri was taken aback by these preparations, she was probably also resigned. No doubt visitors were expected, as sometimes happened, and her appearance was expected to do credit to the chief. She sat submissively while the aunts draped her with jewelry, and thought her own thoughts while one of them slicked her hair with bear's oil to make it glisten, then parted it neatly in the center and arranged it in two braids which were placed over her shoulders in front.

Now attired to the complete satisfaction of the bustling aunts, Tekakwitha sat by the hearthfire in the space assigned her by the chief matron of the lodge. Her uncle sat some distance away. If he studied his adopted daughter with a more than usually calculating eye, it is unlikely that she noticed. For Kateri, downcast eyes were more than the accepted expression of modesty in a maiden. With the lowering of her eyelids, she could all the better retreat within herself. Too, when her blanket wasn't protecting her eyes, and she wasn't wearing it then, lowering her eyelids was protection against the glaring light from the hearthfire.

A young boy, dressed in his most splendid attire,

entered the cabin. The chief greeted him courteously, as did the aunts in their turn. Then the boy sat down beside Tekakwitha.

Kateri must have raised her eyes at the appearance of the boy and opened them wide when he sat down on the mat near her. In the custom of the Iroquois, parents of the young girl select the young man whom they wish to marry into the family. If the young man and his parents are agreeable to this arrangement, the young brave declares his marriage intentions by coming to the girl's cabin and sitting beside her.

Kateri stirred uneasily on her mat, though she did not speak. She was not expected to, nor was the boy. This was a matter for the oldsters. At the appropriate time, one of the aunts turned to Tekakwitha. Would she be so good as to offer the boy to help himself from a bowl of sagamite which was placed beside her?

The girl's cheeks burned so red that the rouge on them was a mockery. If, for one moment, her long discipline in obedience to the wishes of others inclined her to do as she was told, she quickly rejected the idea. This was no simple service she was being asked to perform—it was outright trickery. As the aunts well knew, tradition would compel her to accept this boy in marriage if she proffered the bowl of food to him.

Tekakwitha rose from her mat. Breathless and trembling, she dashed out of the cabin before the astonished family would raise a hand to stop her. Out, out—away from the air oppressive with smoke and treachery—she fled to the nearby cornfields and hid until the indignant visitor had left.

Chapter IV

SPRING'S PROMISE

Tekakwitha's act of rebellion went hard with her. In presuming to reject the marriage which her uncle and aunts held it their prerogative to arrange, she had brought disgrace upon herself in their eyes. What payment was this for having brought up an orphan child at their hearthfire? What perversity was this that led one trained to a life of subservience to set her will against the wisdom of the clan? Tekakwitha, in refusing to fulfill the hopes that had been held out for her, had sacrificed her claim to any future kindness from her own people.

Vindictively, the aunts took pleasure in making Kateri jump to obey their most capricious notions. Her daily tasks became the most odious and menial that the longhouse could provide. And wherever she went, she was the subject of taunts and petty persecutions, not only from her own family, but from all the villagers, young and old.

Yet, whatever she suffered during this period, Kateri

Father de Lamberville of her deep and growing interest in Christianity, her desire for instruction, her wish to be baptised.

Gently, the priest reminded her of the difficulties that would lie in her way, the obstacles and rebuffs she would have to face. But Tekakwitha was already familiar with such difficulties, and her determination was adamant.

Father de Lamberville was a man of perception as well as action. Father Charlevoix describes the priest's reaction to what the Indian girl had to tell him:

"The energy with which she spoke, the courage she displayed, a certain modest yet resolute air that lighted up her countenance, at once told the missionary that this new proselyte would not be an ordinary Christian. He accordingly carefully taught her many things, which he did not explain to all preparing for Baptism." **

The following summer and winter was a time of continuing revelation for Tekakwitha. As soon as she was able to walk, she attended the morning and evening prayers at the chapel. Her waking thoughts became centered exclusively on the great light that was beginning to flood over her heart and mind.

Tekakwitha learned quickly and easily. She learned because she was intelligent, and because she wanted so deeply to use every faculty she had in the pursuit of spiritual understanding. Father de Lamberville had never had so apt a pupil.

** Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Fordham University, Document xvii, p. 425.

Despite her quickness, the priest did not advance her time for baptism. It was customary to investigate the character of all catechumens before accepting them, and Tekakwitha was no exception in this respect. What was her reputation among her people? What of her conduct and morals?

Time softens edges. Though Kateri had flaunted the wishes of her family and delivered an insult to Indian tradition, the Turtles had too many other preoccupations to keep their first resentment fresh. And after all, she had suffered their displeasure humbly. As before, she continued to work hard, "put things in order." It is probable, moreover, that Kateri had actually earned a certain amount of respect for choosing her own way and steadfastly cleaving to it.

When Father de Lamberville questioned Tekakwitha's family and other villagers, he found no one who would speak against her. And even her uncle raised no objections to her decision to be baptised.

Kateri had been a special pupil; Father de Lamberville determined that her baptism should be a special occasion. Here was a convert in whom he saw great possibilities of leadership and influence among her own people, indeed among all Christians. He suspected that her baptism would be remembered, and he chose Easter Sunday as a fittingly memorable day on which it should take place.

Katherine Tekakwitha was twenty years old. Waiting for the day when her dearest wish would at last be realized, she carried her burdens of wood with a lightness of spirit. All her experiences up to that spring, the suffering, the doubts, the persecutions, had after all, had purpose. Spring's promise was Tekakwitha's too.

Chapter V

BAPTISM

Easter Sunday, 1676. The small bark chapel in the village of Caughnawaga stood ready to receive its guests.

The guests were in a holiday mood. Though the message of the Resurrection had little meaning for most of them, they shared a common pleasure in the fresh spring morning and a common willingness to be entertained by the ritual they were about to witness.

The men and women were dressed in their most festive garments. Bright blankets and multicolored beads caught the brilliant sunlight that filtered through the trees overhead as the villagers strolled in and out of the waiting chapel.

The villagers had spared no effort to adorn the sanctum in a manner befitting the solemn event which was to take place in it. The interior was richly arrayed—bear and elk skins hung on the walls, embroidered beaver skins and buffalo hides carpeted the floor. The altar itself boasted a handsome collection of beaded belts and necklaces.

Outside, where children ran about in restless anticipation, the path to the chapel door was lined with small, newly budding trees. These had been planted by Tekakwitha's tribesmen especially for the occasion. Inside, the Indian children who were members of the choir waited impatiently for the ceremony to begin.

Whatever lingering jealousy of Tekakwitha still remained, whatever resentment of the singular course she had chosen, such reservations were unmentioned and perhaps unthought of on the day of her baptism. At that moment, she was a heroine.

A hush fell over the crowd as Father de Lamberville, a violet stole accenting his white linen vestment, took his place just inside the evergreen-trimmed doorway. There he greeted Tekakwitha, as she approached with two other catechumens in attendance.

Her moment had come, and what this moment meant to her was reflected in the radiance of her face. Stepping from the village into the chapel, she walked from her old life into the new one that was about to begin for her. A new life, a new hope, a new name.

The priest commenced the service by bestowing the Christian name Katherine, meaning "Pure," upon this Indian candidate. Henceforth, she would be known as Kateri, the Iroquois equivalent of Katherine.

Then Father de Lamberville proceeded with the questions. "Katherine, what dost thou ask of the Church of God?"

"Faith," she answered softly.

"What doth faith lead thee to?"

"Life everlasting."

Father de Lamberville continued with the traditional words of the sacrament, words that Kateri already knew by heart, words by which so many millions before her

had declared their acceptance of the faith of the Church. "If, therefore, thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments. Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."

Breathing lightly three times across her lowered face, the priest then charged the Evil One, saying: "Depart from her, thou unclean spirit, and give place to the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete!"

Kateri raised her head to receive the sign of the cross upon her forehead and breast. Then Father de Lamberville blessed the salt, symbol of wisdom, and placed a morsel of it on her tongue. Again he bade Satan be gone.

Now they moved into the chapel to stand by the font. Here the priest touched both of Kateri's ears with spittle, pronouncing the mystic word of Christ: *Ephphetha* which means, "Be opened!"

Did Katherine renounce the devil with all his works and pomp? She did, and was accordingly anointed with the oil of the Catechumens. Following this, she made formal profession of her faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed.

Father de Lamberville exchanged his violet stole for a white one, then poured the baptismal waters on her head as he uttered the solemn final words of the sacrament. "Katherine," he said, "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." *

Tekakwitha, now Katherine in faith and fact, stood silently as her father in God placed a white cloth on her head as a token of innocence. He bade her carry it un-

* THE ROMAN RITUAL, P. J. Kenedy and Sons.

sullied from this moment forward until she should stand before the judgment seat of God. Finally, he placed in her hand a lighted taper, the symbol of faith.

The baptism was over. The choir of Indian children, who had looked on in silent wonder, now burst into song. The words of an Iroquois hymn, especially prepared for the missionaries, filled the chapel. Tekakwitha, daughter of the Iroquois, was now a daughter of the Church.

Kateri's own thoughts must have been focused on the future, her whole life ahead, during which she would have the joy and duty of fulfilling the vows she had just made. But Father de Lamberville must have at least briefly let his thoughts dwell on the past which had led to this moment, and particularly on those martyrs of his own Jesuit Order who had worked and suffered to bring the church to a wilderness and its people. For just as surely present on that Easter Sunday as Father de Lamberville himself were the spirits of those who had gone before him—Father Goupil, Father Jogues and John de Lande, and all the other "Blackrobes" who had sown the good seed which had blossomed into this fine flower.

Chapter VI

KATERI TEKAKWITHA ON TRIAL

The baptism was a thing of the past. For most of the people in Tekakwitha's village, it was an occasion remembered more and more dimly, if at all. That this christening had meant the beginning of a completely new life for Kateri herself was a fact beyond the Indian's understanding. But whether or not they understood the inward reasons for Tekakwitha's behavior they were fully able to observe its outward signs.

Kateri, they decided, was carrying things entirely too far. Oh, she did her share of the work, that was true enough. Or it was true except on Sundays and feastdays when she refused to lift a finger. The other members of her longhouse felt quite justified, of course, in refusing her any food on these days when she would not work for it.

Somehow the whole pattern of Katherine's life seemed both a reproach and an insult to the non-Christians in the village. There was her chasity, for example. Even her

new religion did not insist upon such a standard of perfection. What possessed this strange girl to hold fast to her determination not to marry one of the young men who could give real purpose and meaning to her life in the tribe?

Then there were her solitary habits, a constant source of irritation in a gregarious community. Lips tightened as Kateri was seen slipping into the chapel for a period of quiet prayer, or soundlessly moving her lips as she bent over her sewing in the longhouse.

Ridicule is the easy weapon of those who hate and fear what they do not understand. Katherine became a target of fun for the least responsible elements in the village. Children and drunkards took delight in following her as she walked from one place to another, pursuing her with taunts and jeers. Sometimes the abuse was physical as well as verbal. Kateri learned to know the sting of mud, the brutal impact of sharp stones.

In an attempt to elude her persecutors, Kateri began to take a round-about path to her lodge from the chapel. Aha! decided a malicious aunt. Perhaps the chaste and virtuous Christian was human after all. The woman spread a rumor about the village to the effect that Tekakwitha's secretive behavior had an easy explanation. All the while she pretended such piety, she was doubtless sneaking off to meet a lover.

One day when Kateri was sitting in her uncle's lodge, busy with some handiwork, an irate young Indian dashed in and confronted her. He was angry and he was drunk. As Tekakwitha rose, he lifted his arm and brandished his tomahawk over her head.

Did he mean to make her pay in blood because in scorning marriage she seemed to scorn him and his kind? Or did he merely mean to give her a good scare which

would teach her a lesson? Whatever his intentions were, Tekakwitha thwarted them.

She did not cry out for help, or quaver before the threatening weapon. She simply stood before the wild young man, head slightly bent, utterly still and composed. Her whole demeanor expressed not only quiet courage, but an unshakable faith in the God who watched over her and whose will she was quite willing should be done.

It was a reaction that the Indian brave was completely unprepared for. He had approached her in violence, and by all the laws he knew, she should have responded in fear. Instead, she stood there as if a threat to her life were a thing of small consequence.

Slowly the young man lowered his arm, letting the tomahawk dangle limply by his side. He stared in baffled fascination at the slight figure of a girl who had just succeeded in unnerving him so entirely. What was there about her? Something in her bearing helped to clear his alcohol-clouded brain enough so that he realized that he had just been witness to a show of strength, strength of kind far different from his own.

Sheepishly, he turned from his intended victim and walked away. Kateri's fortitude in face of the trials she had to endure in the village was matched only by her zeal to perform her religious obligations with increasing vigor. Father de Lamberville had no need to admonish her against relapsing into pagan habits, as he had with many of his converts. His problem was rather to keep suggesting new duties and devotions as Katherine begged for still sterner demands upon her spiritual resources.

Extra devotional lessons, new prayers of the Rosary, the words of the Gospel—with such words and thoughts Katherine Tekakwitha became more and more deeply involved. And in them she found her freedom and her

reason for existence. Hoeing and weeding in the fields, swinging her hatchet in the woods, plaiting soft willows into baskets, she was occupied only in a physical sense.

Father de Lamberville continued to be a source of strength and encouragement. Katherine could go to him for counsel. She could hear him repeat the words of Christ, urging her to do good even to those who persecuted her. She could listen to him tell of the forty day fast in the wilderness. And then the petty spitefulness of her kinsmen seemed easier to bear, the imposed fasting on Sundays and feast days a small penance to pay.

Chapter VII

FLIGHT TO CANADA

La Prairie—how often Kateri must have thought of this name with hopeless longing. La Prairie, the mission far away in Canada, where Indian converts led a Christian life under the direction of the Jesuits. La Prairie, the present home of the friends who were so dear to her: Anastasia, who had been close to Kateri's own mother; the girl she thought of as her adopted sister, and that sister's husband. They had left Caughnawaga to seek out an environment where they would be able to live according to the dictates of their faith and where they would no longer be under pressure to observe the traditions of the tribe.

Kateri learned that the mission at La Prairie had moved farther up the St. Lawrence River to the foot of the Lachine Rapids. It was now known as the Saint Francis Xavier Mission at Sault St. Louis. Among themselves, the Iroquois referred to the new village as Caughnawaga—the old name of their native village on

the banks of the Mohawk River. Like the earlier settlement, the St. Francis Xavier Mission was situated near rapids, so that the name of Caughnawaga was appropriate as well as nostalgic. And it has persisted—even today, the name of Caughnawaga continues to be associated with the mission of St. Francis Xavier of Sault St. Louis.

Father de Lamberville was too close to Katherine not to be aware of the great urge she had to join the mission community. Indeed, he fully sympathized with her. Steadfast as she had proven herself to be in spite of all obstacles that the village put in her way, the Turtle castle was no place to foster the full development of a Christian soul—especially one so promising as that of Father de Lamberville's new convert.

The priest had now long gloried in Katherine's conduct and progress. He had watched on admiringly as she pursued her chosen course in the face of countless difficulties and frustrations. He had taken note that even some of her tribesmen—the more worthy ones in particular—had begun to honor and respect her. Life in her own village had been a hard test, but Katherine had passed it with grace. It might well be that no further purpose would be served by her remaining there. Indeed, Father de Lamberville finally concluded that everything pointed to the advisability of Katherine's joining the Christian missionary community in Canada.

The problem was one of timing. Kateri could not simply leave her native village on a moment's notice. There would be great resistance to her departure, especially from her uncle. The girl would have to leave secretly, and under the protection of the people who would be willing to undergo the risks of spiriting away the niece of an Indian chief.

In the meantime, Katherine kept her hopes to herself.

A home in "Praying Castle," as the Indians called the Sault settlement, was only a dream.

From time to time, converts from the mission did visit the Turtle castle. When they arrived, Kateri listened with envy to their accounts of a village life that was enhanced by a common faith.

Then, in the fall of 1677, three Indians paddled up the Mohawk River to beach their canoe at Caughnawaga. The leader of the expedition was an Indian called "Hot Ashes." They traveled from the Sault with a purpose in mind. Word reached Kateri's "sister" of the ill-treatment the girl was enduring in her own village, and she and her husband had decided that Tekakwitha should be brought to the Praying Castle.

This was not the first expedition of the kind that Hot Ashes had led into the country of the Five Nations, he had come before, as he came now, to help spread the Christian faith among the Iroquois and to proclaim the merits of the mission of St. Francis Xavier.

Kateri, who was now twenty-one years old, listened intently when Hot Ashes spoke to the other villagers, when he spoke of a life free from spiritual oppression. Imagine living in a place where the desire to lead a moral existence was not constantly mocked and belittled! Imagine being able to share with others the aspirations closest to one's own heart! Kateri decided that she must join Hot Ashes and his party when they returned to the Mission of the Sault, at no matter what risk.

But was her decision a worthy one? As usual, when she needed advice, Kateri sought out Father de Lamberville.

The priest listened attentively as Kateri spoke of her desire to join the Canadian mission. He considered the problems that would be involved. As far as Katherine

herself was concerned, he was in no doubt. In the more congenial atmosphere of the Mission, there would be every opportunity for her to further the progress she had already made. The Turtle castle would lose an invaluable influence for good, but Father de Lamberville was conscious of a still higher consideration that must operate. He had a duty to encourage any move that would serve to cultivate the full blossoming of a convert whom he already recognized as a rare flower. Kateri would have no difficulty in learning to live happily and usefully among the Hurons, Algonquins, Eries, Neutrals, and French who were all gathered at the mission of St. Francis Xavier. The chances were great that she would even bring to these people already committed to Christianity an example that would inspire their faith.

The main problem that concerned Father de Lamberville was one of means. How could Kateri leave her own village, when her uncle would surely oppose such a move with all his strength? How could she be snatched away from the jealous watchfulness of the aunts who would be similarly determined to force her to remain within the confines of the village? The priest decided to speak to Hot Ashes and see what could be arranged.

Hot Ashes pointed out that the canoe in which he had arrived would accommodate only three people. However, he told Father de Lamberville, he would be willing to give up his own place to Kateri. There were other tribes which he wished to visit before returning to Canada. He would continue alone, and Katherine could accompany her adopted sister's husband and his Huron companion on the long journey back to the Sault.

The journey would not be an easy one. The route lay through swamps and woods, lakes and streams. It

would be necessary for the travelers to sustain themselves on whatever nuts, berries, and fruits they could find. Moreover, their departure from the Turtle village would have to be as swift and secret as possible. If they could escape before the villagers and the chief realized that Kateri had gone with them, they might avoid an attempt to force the girl to remain behind.

As it turned out, good fortune attended Tekakwitha's flight. When the time came for her to leave with her companions, her uncle was away from the village. He had gone to Fort Orange, now Albany, New York, to negotiate with the English. The aunts, surprisingly, made no active effort to interfere with her departure. They were unwilling, perhaps, to attempt any longer to impose their will upon this girl who had so successfully resisted them in the past. Possibly they had also acquired a grudging respect for the wisdom of her judgments. In any case, the way to Kateri's departure seemed suddenly clear.

The leave-taking between Katherine and her spiritual adviser must have been painful and moving to them both. She was saying goodbye to the priest who had brought the light of faith into her life. He was losing a convert who had made all his years of work among the Mohawks seem finally worthwhile.

The letter which Father de Lamberville gave to Katherine to take with her speaks eloquently of his feeling for the girl he had baptised in the little bark chapel. It was addressed to Father Cholenec, who with Father Chauchetiere assisted Father Fremin at the Sault Mission, and it read:

"Katherine Tegakouita is going to live at the Sault. Will you kindly undertake to direct her? You will

soon know what a treasure we have sent you. Guard it well then! May it profit in your hands, for the glory of God and the salvation of a soul that certainly is very dear to him." *

With Father de Lamberville's letter in her hand, and his blessing behind her, Katherine set forth by canoe with her protectors.

At last the moment of deliverance had come. If she felt any pangs of nostalgia as they paddled down the Mohawk River, past the familiar sights of her childhood and young womanhood, they must have been slight compared with the anticipation of what lay before her.

There was, of course, still a possibility of trouble. What if their small canoe should encounter Kateri's uncle returning up the river from his business with the English? Fortunately, however, this part of the trip passed without incident. The party reached the bend in the river near what is now Amsterdam, New York, and along a path through the tangled forest—a long and arduous walk.

In the meantime, Kateri's absence from the longhouse had been noted—perhaps by her fickle aunts or perhaps by other members of the lodge—and acted upon. Runners were dispatched from the Turtle castle to Fort Orange to inform the chief that his niece had escaped.

The old chief, angry and frustrated, hastily returned to his lodge. There he grimly loaded his gun with three bullets and set out after the travelers. His intent was to kill. From his point of view, Katherine had committed an act of irredeemable treachery. Making all possible speed,

* Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Fordham University, Document X, p. 249.

he set out through the woods in pursuit of his intended victims.

Father Cholenec, writing in 1696, recorded the events that followed when the chief caught up with the escaping trio:

“They saw him coming from afar, and as they were doubtful as to his plans, they hid Katherine in the woods, while the others, sat down by the road as if to eat. Coming upon them, he asked them very abruptly where his niece was. They answered that they had seen her in the village and that they could not tell him anything else about her, whereupon the old man, God doubtless wishing it to be so, turned back without making any further effort to find her.” **

If Katherine and her friends had needed any proof that God watched over them in their flight, this miraculous escape would have more than provided it. With new energy and jubilant spirits, they continued on their journey. The Turtle castle was not far behind them. Ahead lay the Mission of Francis Xavier, and freedom.

They proceeded onward through swamps and tangles of shrubs and under towering trees. Finally they reached the Lake of the Blessed Sacrament, now known as Lake George. There, tucked away among bushes close to shore on the southernmost tip of the lake, they found the canoe where Hot Ashes had hidden it enroute to the Mohawk Valley. They glided over Lakes George and Champlain and down the Richelieu River. Then, moving westward,

** Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, Document X: p. 248.

they walked through the vast forest that lay between them and the St. Lawrence River. It was a chilly day in the autumn of 1677 when they reached their destination. Before them lay the clearing and buildings—the Mission of St. Francis Xavier. For Kateri Tekakwitha, the arrow of Mohawk omnipotence was broken forever.

Chapter VIII

CHRISTMAS DAY

Except for the fact that it was neat and orderly, Anastasia's lodge, shared by the adopted sister and her husband, was not different from the dwelling places Katherine had known before. Bunches of corn and slabs of bear and deer meat hung from the walls. And, awaiting the winter that would soon come, snowshoes were propped against the roughly hewn logs.

Kateri Tekakwitha sat on the matted floor eating from a bark plate with a wooden spoon. Before her, the hearthfire burned brightly, and she shielded her eyes from its glare with the now rumpled red blanket which had accompanied her so far.

The traveler's reception had been a warm one, no less so for Kateri than for her adopted sister's husband and his Huron friend. Words would come later. No speaking was necessary for Kateri to understand the deep satisfaction which Anastasia and her adopted sister felt as they received her into their household. Now, according

to Indian custom, they must eat and rest and find comfort.

It was after these first amenities had been observed that the visitors began to arrive at the lodge. Then, when one of the visitors found the moment convenient and discreet, the conversation began. What news from the Mohawk Valley? What of the long journey that had just been completed? All listened attentively as Kateri's brother-in-law, as she called her adopted sister's husband, began the story of their experiences.

Shy as she was, Kateri did not mind being watched and studied by the visiting villagers. Their curiosity was friendly, their sympathy clear. Indeed, she found herself staring back with equal interest at these people among whom she was to live her new life.

Later, there would be time to sort out her first impressions and to form new ones. She would walk outside the lodge and look up with prayerful wonder at the tall wooden cross which crowned the steep bank of the mission village. She would look down on the majestic St. Lawrence River which flowed below, and strain her eyes in the direction of the tree-filled Heron Island, where restless waters hurled themselves against the shore.

Kateri visited the new stone chapel which was still in the process of being built. She entered the temporary wooden chapel nearby to pray, and she found no lack of subjects for prayer. Thanksgiving for the love of friends, for the peace and harmony which she found everywhere at the Praying Castle. And such prayers, in Kateri's mind, must surely be accompanied by prayers of dedication. She prayed that she might prove worthy of her blessings, that her life itself might become an act of praise in the name of God and Christ.

Father Cholenec received her as Father de Lamber-ville had known he would when he recommended Kateri

to the priest's kind care. The two other priests, Father Fremin and Father Chauchetiere, were equally happy to welcome the new arrival. Like the Blackrobes Kateri had known before, all three men seemed inspired by a spirit that could never cease to seem marvelous to one reared in the harsh traditions of a warlike Indian tribe.

With her fingers busy at work, Kateri and Anastasia sat side by side for many hours over many days and weeks, listening to the words of their Jesuit mentors. There was so much to learn, so much to reflect upon. How could a lifetime be enough to absorb the full meaning of the Christian message? Certainly no hours, no minutes, should be lost in the great attempt.

Kateri regretted even the hours she must spend in sleep. As the late autumn turned cold and raw, she would be at the altar of the little bark chapel by four o'clock in the morning to begin her day of long prayer and a period of quiet receptiveness to the will of God as He might choose to make known to her waiting spirit. She heard Mass at daybreak and again at sunrise. She returned to the chapel at intervals during the day, as her work permitted, praying not only for her salvation, but for the salvation of those at the Turtle castle. After evening prayers at the close of the day, she often remained at the foot of the altar long after the others departed.

Sundays and feast days were high points of Katherine's existence. The words of the Masses, the Rosary, the hymns, the Vespers—all burned deep upon her mind. And one day, God willing, she would be more than an eager student of the Sacraments; she would receive them as a full member of the Christian Church.

Kateri felt herself too unworthy to hope that that day might be soon coming. There was a probationary

period to be served before a convert might be admitted to First Communion, and Kateri's estimate of her spiritual preparedness was a humble one.

The priests thought differently. They watched her daily performance of her religious duties, and noted that she always required of herself more than they would have thought to urge. They saw with appreciation that her mind was quick and inquiring; she grasped the most complicated ideas with seeming ease. The hymns, the lives of the Saints, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Litanies of the Blessed Mother were soon familiar to her as if she had known them all her life.

An unprecedented decision was made. In the light of the unique qualifications of the new arrival at the mission, the probationary period was shortened. Katherine was told that she would be permitted to make her first communion on Christmas Day.

All those other Christmases, before her arrival at the Sault, Tekakwitha had been a humble bystander. She had stood reverently before the figure of the Infant Jesus which Father Boniface had placed upon a bed of moss in the gaily decorated chapel in her Turtle village. She had studied with awe and wonder Father Pierron's canvas painting of the Wise Men who had come from the East to bear gifts to the Christ Child. Now the anniversary of her Savior's birth was to be the occasion of her own birth into the Church. It was a miracle indeed, and one for which she felt both thankful and completely undeserving.

Not since her baptism had Kateri looked forward to an event with such hope and prayer. So few days remained to prepare herself for what lay ahead. How could she ever attain to the purity of mind and heart which she felt herself bound to offer? By what second miracle could

she receive the grace that would make her acceptable at the Table of the Lord? Kneeling in the chapel in attentive silence, she awaited the blessing which could only be a gift.

There were others in the chapel that Christmas morning. Each of them, in his own way, must have knelt there willing to be led in the path of the Christ Child. Each of them was no doubt deeply moved as he approached the altar to receive the Sacrament. But there was a difference—and all those present felt it—in the girl who walked toward them.

Kateri's face hooded in the worn red blanket which had protected her for so long against sunlight and rain. Now it served as the traditional head-covering of a Christian woman in the presence of the Cross. And the face within radiated a sunlight of its own. She came forward slowly, with timid dignity. Only the quick rise and fall of the rosary beads on her breast betrayed her inner emotions as she received, for the first time, the rites of the Holy Eucharist

She seemed different, she was different, she remained so. Something happened before the Christmas altar, something that was the culmination of all that had gone on before in the spiritual development of Katherine Tekakwitha. "Our Lord knew," Father Cholenec wrote later, "what passed between Himself and His dear spouse during her First Communion. All that we can say is that from that day forward she appeared different to us, because she remained so full of God and love of Him." *

* Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Fordham University, Document X, p. 256.

Chapter IX

THE HUNT

The Mission village of St. Francis Xavier was a Christian community. It was no Turtle village where religious life was often regarded with skepticism and indifference when it was regarded at all. Nevertheless, the village was still an Indian settlement in the wilderness. The business of sustaining life had to go on. The rituals of planting and harvest and hunting must still be observed, even as they had been in the communities of Kateri's childhood.

Christmas had come and gone, and it was time for the annual winter hunt. Animals must be found and killed and slaughtered for food and for pelts which could be traded with Europeans for knives and firearms.

A few people would remain behind in the almost deserted village while the rest departed on snowshoes to track down the game that awaited them in the forests beyond. Most of those who stayed, however, were villagers who in any case could not be useful to the hunters—the old, the very young, the sick, and a few matrons who would take care of the children.

Katherine could not refuse when her adopted sister and her husband asked her to accompany them on the expedition. Much as she might have preferred to remain close to her beloved chapel, she had a duty to be useful as best she could to those who had so unstintingly shared their food and roof with her. She was able; her hands were needed for the hard work of cutting up the meat and curing the hides. She agreed to go.

The absence of the hunters would be a long one, three or four months, depending upon their luck. To remind them of their religious obligations and to help them in their observance, the Jesuit fathers made careful preparations. A member of the party was appointed to see to it that special days were observed and to lead them in morning and evening prayers. The priests also made bark scrolls on which they traced a calendar-like schedule indicating important dates: Sundays, feast days, and days of fast.

Katherine herself needed no such reminders. She knew the calendar of her church as surely as she knew the words of its litanies. The cross, pendant around her neck—a present from one of the priests—and the rosary in her hand were constant and tangible reminders of her sacred duties. No other duties, no matter how time-consuming or physically exhausting, would be able to distract her from their observance. The hunting party woke early each morning, but Kateri was always awake even earlier and busy with her prayers. Nor did her meditations end when the evening prayers of the group were over and her companions fell asleep on their mats.

The hunters built a temporary hut, sheathed with snow and ice. Furs and skins were stuffed into the cracks against the cold outside, and a hearthfire burned within at all times. Here, as in the more spacious lodges of their village, work went on. There were carcasses to cut up,

food to prepare, meals to serve. There was time, too, for song and chatter.

In spite of the rigors of camping out in the winter, many of those in the party regarded the hunting trip as a kind of vacation. It was, after all, a break in the usual routine. It was a time for laughter and amusement as well as for work.

Katherine did not separate herself from the life that went on in the hut. She did add something new to its quality. Were her friends in a mood for song? She would willingly lead them in the singing of hymns. Did a peaceful hour before the heartfire seem a good time for storytelling? Kateri could remember many fascinating details from the lives of the saints, which she had learned about from Anastasia and the missionaries. Were the hunters weary and irritable after a long, fruitless day in the woods? Kateri's good nature and quiet charm acted as a balm to frayed tempers.

Still, Katherine could not do without solitude. She needed to be alone at times to listen to the voices that spoke to her from her heart.

She found the setting her spirit craved on the banks of a stream underneath a sheltering canopy of snow-laden trees. Here, on the bark of one of the trees, she carved a cross, and the deserted spot became her private shrine, a place for prayer and penance.

Prayer alone was not enough. For Kateri, in her ever-growing dedication to her faith, was increasingly conscious of the sufferings her lord had endured in order to redeem His people. Every comfort she allowed herself to enjoy began to seem to her an act of disloyalty to Him who had died on the Cross. How could she justify her physical well-being when He had bled for her? How could she accept food as her right when He had suffered for her? In an anguish of penitence, she knelt before her secluded

"altar" and beat her frail body with switches. Back in the hut, she secretly mixed ashes with her food.

The course of spiritual development which Katherine was pursuing was too special and too demanding for the other members of her party to understand completely. For one thing, she never mentioned her acts of prayer and sacrifice. For another, even the most devout of her companions would have probably fallen short of appreciating the extraordinary compulsion which motivated her. Those around her saw that she was good and pious; they saw that she worked well and did not hold herself above the rest. But they assumed, naturally enough, that she was still "only human." Were they not all?

Being "only human" means different things to different people. Generally, however, it means that we are aware that in ourselves and in others unworthy instincts are freely intermingled with more noble qualities. And what we recognize as unworthy in ourselves we are sometimes too willing to believe to be true of others as well.

The woman who was to cause Kateri to undergo her greatest trial during that winter hunting trip was probably not malicious. She was quick to come to a wrong conclusion, over-jealous, "only human." She no doubt believed she was right and that her behavior was justified.

It started one evening in the hut. An exhausted hunter, back from a long day of tracking bear and deer, flung himself down on a pallet near Tekakwitha's. His wife looked on suspiciously. Tired, was he? Very well—but why *that* pallet? Had Tekakwitha encouraged her husband to think that she would wish him to be near her? The woman's suspicions were too vague for her to dare to speak them out, but as she sat there in silence, she let her imagination enlarge upon the meaning of the incident.

The wife might have continued to hold her tongue, except for a second occurrence. Her husband, knowing of Kateri's special dexterity with the needle, asked her if she would mend a rent in his canoe. And Katherine, anxious as always to be of service, innocently obliged.

Before, in the village of the Turtles, when Kateri had been a victim of slander, her accuser had spoken out angrily to all who would listen. Luckily, the tone of the Christian village was a more charitable one. Angry as the woman was, she did not speak to anyone at the camp about her conviction. She waited until they had returned to the Sault, and then she took her story to a priest.

The priest was nonplussed. The woman who accused Tekakwitha had a commendable reputation at the mission, and Kateri was, after all, still a newcomer. Yet Kateri's behavior had been beyond reproach. He asked the wife a number of sharp and penetrating questions, and ended up as perplexed as he was disturbed.

He called Tekakwitha to him. As delicately as possible, he sketched in what he had heard and asked the girl to tell him the truth of the situation.

Katherine knew her innocence. She did not leap into a detailed defense of her behavior. She did not even ask who had spoken so ill of her. She responded to the priest only with a simple denial of the story he had been told. As far as her accuser was concerned, she said only that she prayed that God might forgive her.

Tekakwitha's brief words were enough to convince the priest. Indeed, it is likely that he might have been convinced without any words at all. Innocence is something that shows in a face, and dignity is reflected bearing. And at this point in Kateri's life, her character was there to be read—even by a man less spiritually sensitive than the priest who believed her.

Chapter X

A TIME OF REJOICING

For the American Indians, as for all people who live in close contact with nature, the arrival of a new season was an important occasion. With the passing of one season and the birth of another, the rhythm of life itself either slowed or quickened. Spring was the quickening time, when the hard routine of winter existence yielded with the thawing of the earth. The pagan Indians had called springtime the "Budding of the Leaf," and they had honored its arrival with a festival.

Kateri Tekakwitha, like other young Indian girls, had taken part in the celebrational observances. She had danced to the beat of Turtle drum at the time of the Berry festival, the Planting festival and the Harvest. She had danced in honor of the Maple Tree as part of the ceremonies that commemorated the "Budding of the Leaf."

In the spring of 1678, however, she returned from the hunt to the Praying Castle prepared to rejoice in a

way that had little to do with the traditional rituals of her childhood. In the Christian community to which she now belonged, the springtime emphasis was not so much upon the revival of physical nature as upon the Resurrection of Christ. The converts, however, did not forget their dependence upon the earth and its bounties.

Indeed, the priest himself would lay on his altar the first seeds to be sown, and bless them as he would later bless the first fruits of the harvest. But the deeper meaning of the winter that had gone before lay in Lent, and the full significance of spring was to be realized in the observances of Holy Week.

Katherine had returned to the Sault after the trials of the winter hunt fully committed to a renewed dedication of heart and mind. She returned thankful to find herself once again in an environment where total observance of her religious duties would be more possible. She returned—we can only imagine with what gratitude—to the chapel where she had made her first and last communion the Christmas before. Now, after those long months when the consolation of the Sacrament had been denied her, she could begin to prepare herself to receive it again.

Kateri felt herself happy and privileged during the period of prayerful waiting which preceded her second Communion. Assisting at the Masses, honoring the Blessed Virgin, listening to the words of the scripture, she was once again participating in those tangible acts of worship which constantly enlarged her conception of God's divinity.

On Good Friday, she listened in painful awe to the sermon of the Passion of Our Lord. The story of her Savior's suffering and death was far more than just a story to her. It was an experience which she shared with

high importance for Katherine. It is unlikely that she had any idea of its full meaning for those around her. Was she aware of the unusual excitement that her fellow members felt as they joined her in the chapel on that Easter Sunday? Did she realize how they vied with one another in an effort to kneel beside *her* at that crude wooden altar rail—as if she might somehow brush off on them the grace she seemed to personify? The questions are undoubtedly academic. Katherine's own humility and her concentration on the deeper significance of the occasion would have precluded any such distraction of mind.

The other converts who crowded beside her at the altar were conscious of the light she reflected. The uplifted face of the frail figure at the rail seemed to gaze straight into the ultimate source of light. One of their own, with them in body, she was yet apart. She would return to her lodge, perform her chores, pull her red blanket across her face while she labored in the fields, but her eyes would be increasingly and irrevocably upon other horizons. Her oneness was with God.

Chapter XI

A HOLY ALLIANCE

For Katherine Tekakwitha, solitude was a necessity and a pleasure. Increasingly, she sought out the times and places that provided her with the opportunity for private meditation. Walking by herself, she felt close to her God. Undistracted by the presence of others, she could perform the acts and prayers of penance which she regarded as both joy and duty.

One path was particularly dear to her. She had walked it barefoot when the winter snows were deep and she had walked it when spring's wild winds whipped her covered shoulders. It led to the foot of the tall wooden cross that dominated the river bank. Here she could kneel in prayer, and then reciting her rosary, stroll along the banks of the broad, persistent river. Sometimes she walked to the beginning of the rapids, where the water stormed against huge rocks, rising and then crashing back in a turbulence of foam. And Kateri's spirit responded with particular sympathy to the contrasting

peace and agitation of the waters around her. She, too, had known struggle, distress; she, too, had found through faith the meaning of serenity.

There were few in the village, not even her adopted sister, who could fully understand the deep core of quiet which was Katherine's unique strength. Of all those she knew, Anastasia had come closest to the appreciation of the girl's nature. Anastasia, friend of her mother, had been Kateri's confidante and spiritual companion. But Anastasia was growing older now. Their conversations beside the hearthfire, their walks through the fields and woods, were becoming less frequent. Much as these two women loved each other, the older could no longer really share the energy of purpose and conviction which radiated from the younger.

The inevitable loosening of the bond of friendship between Kateri and Anastasia left a gap. Unlike most of the gregarious Iroquois girls of her age, however, Katherine did not consciously suffer from the lack of companionship in her own age group. She gave freely of her time and interest to the young people to whom she gave religious instruction. She visited the sick, who found comfort in her attentions. Then, with her duties done and no one in immediate need of her presence, she resumed her solitary walks.

In the course of one such walk, Tekakwitha wandered into the new church which was under construction at the Sault. She lingered inside, watching the men who were at work on the paneling. Peering out from under her hooded blanket, she studied the empty bell tower. Already a shipment of beaver pelts had been sent to France in payment for the Angelus bell which would arrive one day to replace the hand bell that had long summoned the villagers to the morning, noon, and evening devotions.

It was a few moments before Kateri realized that someone was standing, rather shyly, beside her. Turning to look, she saw a young woman not far from her own age. Katherine could not remember having seen her before, but then, there were perhaps some five hundred or more villagers at the Sault, and their paths did not always cross.

The two women greeted each other, and Kateri learned that her new acquaintance's name was Marie Theresa Tegaiaguenta. Like Katherine, Marie Theresa had come into the new chapel out of curiosity, and their conversation began politely, on that immediate subject of interest. Katherine wondered out loud which section of the new building would be reserved for the women. Marie Theresa pointed to the area where she thought that the women would be seated.

There must have been something in Marie's face and manner, and something too in Kateri's own highly sensitive response to people, that led the ordinarily shy Tekakwitha to abandon her usual reserve. What began as an unremarkable social exchange ended in a flash of discovery wherein each was to open herself to the other without barriers of convention or restraint.

Kateri found herself speaking, with tears in her eyes, of the reflections which the new chapel had suggested to her. It was not in material temples, she said, that God took most pleasure—but in those human hearts that opened up to give Him sanctuary. Yet, she herself had so often driven Him from her own heart, where He wished to reign alone! She confessed that the knowledge of this was a torture to her, and that she believed it would be only fit punishment for her ingratitude if God should close to her forever the door of the sanctuary now being built to His glory.

Marie Theresa was deeply impressed by Kateri's earnestness and by the spiritual power which she could discern in her words. She, too, had felt the unworthiness for grace of which Katherine spoke so feelingly—yet with more reason, she felt sure.

The two women left the chapel to walk down the path to the river bank. There they sat at the foot of the cross, and talked. Marie Theresa listened while Kateri described the experiences of her life up to that time. And Katherine was equally attentive when Marie described her own history.

It must have required courage for Marie Theresa to be frank with the new friend whom she already respected so much. For her life had been far from a perfect one. Born a child of the Oneida Nation, she had been baptised in her native village. After a time, however, she had all but forgotten her baptismal promises. Like too many of the Indians in her village, she had fallen into drunkenness and her religious observances became slipshod. Still, she and the husband whom she had married remained Christian enough to be attracted by the Mission at La Prairie. In 1675, they went there to live.

During the following winter, Marie Theresa and her husband, left the Mission on a hunting trip. Marie took with her one of her sister's children, a small boy. Along the way, they joined company with a band of Iroquois whom they met near the Ottawa River, to form a party of eleven people in all.

The winter was an excruciating one. The snow was late in falling, and only one elk was killed. When that had been eaten, famine set in. The group kept barely alive by eating barks and herbs and the small skins they had saved for making moccasins. Marie's husband became seriously ill.

Desperation turned to horror. One Mohawk and one Seneca left the party for a day's hunting, and only the Mohawk came back. There were many possible explanations, but only one was really likely. The Mohawk returned in good health—better than when he left. He had apparently eaten his companion.

It was necessary to move on. Starvation might lie ahead, but it was an even surer possibility where they were. Marie protested—her husband was too sick to begin another journey. Then let him die, suggested the others. When Marie refused to abandon the sick man, the group moved on, leaving her behind with her husband and small nephew. When her husband died two days later, Marie buried him, and carrying her nephew on her shoulders, trudged on in pursuit of the rest.

By some miracle of endurance, Marie Theresa managed to overtake the hunters who had gone ahead. She found them in a condition even more deplorable than when they had abandoned her a short time before. Weak and exhausted from their long travel of twenty days, still unable to locate game, they felt that their only recourse was to eat some of their own group in order to sustain the rest. The Seneca widow and her two children seemed the logical victims since her husband presumably had been disposed of by the Mohawk. What did Marie think? They turned to her as the only baptised member of their party, the one who would be best able to interpret the Christian law on this serious matter.

She could not answer; she could not counsel them. On the one hand, she was obsessed by fear. Suppose she sanctioned the killing of the Senecas? (Widow and her children were eaten later.) She, herself, might well be next on the list. On the other hand, she felt her own soul to be in such precarious state that she had little faith

or certainty left to draw on. She was tormented by the evil deeds of her past life, her failure even to have made confession before starting out on the hunt. Praying for God's pardon and guidance, she made a solemn vow that if He would deliver her from her present peril, the rest of her life should be an act of penance.

God had spared her, she told Kateri—and spared her no doubt that she might fulfill her promise to Him. We are told that she and four others of the original band of eleven finally made their way back to La Prairie in mid-winter. One can only conjecture that another member of the group suffered the same fate as the Seneca man, his widow and the two children. And Marie Theresa, her heart full of gratitude, had hastened to make a full confession. As for her promised penance, she was too soon forgetful, too easily distracted. The life of dedication which she owed to her Lord was a debt that remained unpaid.

Tekakwitha could forgive the sins of others with infinitely more tolerance than she could regard her own. Indeed, it is unlikely that she even distinguished the wide discrepancy between her own "sins" and those which burdened her new friend. She listened to Marie Theresa's story with sympathy, and she heard not so much the details of her wrongdoings as the ring of truth in Marie's contrition.

The chance meeting between the two women was the beginning of a fast friendship. Katherine had at last found someone with whom, as with Anastasia, she could share her most profound convictions, her deepest doubts. Marie Theresa had discovered a soul so steadfast that she regained, and from thenceforth would pursue, her desire for a changed life.

Chapter XII

A TRIP TO MONTREAL

Although Kateri turned to Marie Theresa for daily companionship, Anastasia's influence upon her was a continuing one. The Oneida widow, at 28, was closer in age to Kateri, who was 22, but Kateri would never forget the counsels which Anastasia had imparted to her. Both Kateri and Marie were united in their intention to do penance; Anastasia had suggested the forms that such penance might take.

What penance, Kateri had once asked, did the older woman consider to be most severe? Anastasia's answer was definite: the burning of the flesh. For was not the fire of hell the most terrible of all the means by which God Himself undertook to punish sins? And Kateri struck by the logic of her counselor's reasoning, had acted upon it the very night of their conversation. When everyone else in the village was asleep, she had burned her legs with firebrands. Then, in her pain she had spent the rest of the night at prayer in the cold, damp chapel.

Marie Theresa was ready to emulate her friend's example of self-chastisement. Through her relationship with Kateri, she had found the strength at last to act upon her own vows of penance, so long delayed. Together, they would walk toward an abandoned hut in the woods, telling their beads along the way. At the hut, far from curious eyes, they would interrupt their prayers and spiritual dialogue to cut switches from the surrounding birch trees. With these, they would scourge each other's bare shoulders. Or, on another occasion, they might place burning coals between their toes. No day passed that they did not repeat one of these acts of contrition or decide upon some other, equally taxing.

Kateri insisted that their pious activities be kept private. She had no desire, nor did Marie, that the religious obligations they imposed upon themselves should attract general attention. Only Father Cholenec was aware of the singular union that had developed between the two. He saw that they were one in a determination to become wholehearted disciples of their Lord, and he gave them his blessing as two Christians joined in a common bond of spiritual help and encouragement.

Like any two young women, Kateri and Marie discussed marriage. They brought different experiences to the discussion, but found themselves in complete agreement as to their present sentiments. Marie, who had once been married, was convinced that she should never marry again. Katherine, who had always been strongly attracted by the ideal of chastity, renewed her resolve to remain a virgin forever. For each of them, the unmarried state seemed to represent the only way of life in which it could be possible to give oneself entirely to God.

If the two Indian girls had been exposed directly or indirectly to convent life, their growing inclination to

follow in the footsteps of the Brides of the Church would seem less remarkable. As it was, they seemed to take this direction by instinct and in response to their own spiritual needs.

It was arranged that Kateri and Marie Theresa should have the opportunity to journey to Montreal for a few days' visit with the Sisters of the Hotel-Dieu and the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, who were established in that city. Father Cholenec was no doubt responsible for the plan. He could not have failed to realize the momentous experience that this visit would provide the two converts who were in every way so open to spiritual impressions.

It is hard to imagine how Montreal must have appeared to the eyes of the two daughters of the Iroquois wilderness. Nothing could have contrasted more sharply with the lodges of an Indian village than the large stone houses of Montreal, with their glass windows, shutters, and chimneys. And how they must have stared at the horses and carriages that clattered down the cobblestone streets! Even such rural touches as cows and chickens were new and strange in terms of what they had known before.

For Kateri, however, none of the sights of the city could provide quite the same impact as her first glimpse of the French Sisters. She watched them with awe as they walked, clad in their spotless white linen coifs and billowy black gowns, to assemble for prayers. She noted the serenity of their faces as they went about their daily duties, teaching the French and Indian children, caring for the sick in the hospital. She herself knew what it was to combine an active life of service with periods of religious contemplation. Here, in the cloister, this kind of life had taken on symmetry and meaning.

Kateri and Marie Theresa returned to the Praying Castle in a mood of thoughtful humility. Both had been strongly drawn to the regimen of the cloister and the promise which it seemed to hold out for a more perfect life. How, they wondered, could they use their new insights to advance their own spiritual development here in this outpost of Christian civilization? Would it be possible—even desirable—to withdraw from the life of the community?

Marie Theresa shared Kateri's drive toward a more intensified religious life. In answer to her friend's questions, she had a suggestion to make. There was another woman at the Praying Castle, Marie Skarichions; she had lived at the Mission of Lorette in Quebec before coming to the Sault. Marie Theresa suggested that she and Kateri should ask this woman to meet with them. With her wider knowledge of the world, Marie Skarichions might well be able to guide them toward some arrangement of life that would approximate what they had seen among the nuns in Montreal. Kateri, always eager to move forward, welcomed the idea with enthusiasm.

The three women had their first meeting at the foot of the cross on the bank of the river. Marie Skarichions, being the eldest and the invited guest, spoke first. She explained that when she lived in Quebec, she had been hospitalized. During her illness, she had had a chance to make a close study of the religious habits of the nuns. It seemed to her not impossible that the three of them, if they were so agreed, might conduct their lives on a similiar model of religious discipline. Living together, dressing alike, they might establish a monastic regimen not unlike that of the city sisters.

The two younger women were immediately attracted

by this plan. But there were practical difficulties—perhaps insurmountable. Where, in this crowded village, could they live enough apart to make a sisterhood possible? How could they fully escape the attention and distraction of the villagers?

Looking across the waters from where the three women sat, they could see the small, wooded island of Heron. Was that the answer? If so, it would be an appealing one to Kateri. There, among the evergreens, birds, and animals she knew so well, she would surely feel at home. They could build a lodge; Kateri herself would erect a cross beside it. Far enough from the village to afford seclusion, the island was yet near enough so that it would be feasible for them to attend Mass in the new chapel. If only Father Cholenec would agree to the proposal—the new life they sought so earnestly would then surely begin.

Father Cholenec had not often said no to Kateri. From the beginning, he had made special exceptions for her in recognition of her unusual qualities of mind and spirit. This time, however, he was not to be persuaded by her pleading. Sympathetic as he was to the idea of a convent, he could not permit the three women to settle on the island of Heron. Marie Theresa and Kateri were young and inexperienced—and they were women. There was the danger that they would be annoyed by young braves enroute to trading posts at Montreal. Then there were the rapids—dangerous and tricky to cross. And what about food? They would be hard put to it to find enough to live on in the limited compass of the island.

Father Cholenec smiled benignly and shook his head. No, all things considered, the women had best give up the idea of a monastic life on Heron. Let them continue to

live as they had been living. There were many ways of serving the Master, and one of them was to live among the villagers at the Praying Castle.

Disappointed as she was, Kateri could not protest. A dream had tumbled down, but she must swallow her regret. And in doing so, she was preparing herself unknowingly for another disappointment to come.

Chapter XIII

ANOTHER BLAST

Katherine Tekekwitha called the season of warm mists "Kanonage," we call it "Indian Summer." Now, in late autumn, the warm mists had given way to sleet, snow, and high winds. The atmosphere took on the sternness of early winter. Flocks of snow geese, following the Pole Star, had terminated their majestic flights from the islands in the Arctic Seas to their winter homing grounds in Louisiana, Florida, and the Antilles. And just ahead lay that quick ascent into winter.

Preparations for the annual hunt were underway. The men undertook the formation of parties, the tightening-up and restringing of snowshoes, the inspection of guns and traps. The matrons assembled the food, cooking utensils, blankets, rolls of bark, and handiwork that would be needed during the three to four months in the woods.

Tekakwitha looked on without envy. She was not afraid of the rigors of the hunt, nor did she object to carrying a loaded frame on her back with the pull of the

burden strap across her forehead and chest, even though it was a strain on her delicate body. But she knew from experience the pain of being separated from her church, and she had resolved never again to accompany a hunting party. Perhaps Kateri's refusal to go on the expedition was also strengthened—if enforcement was necessary—by further criticisms of her celibacy.

Her adopted sister had struck the first blow late that summer. This woman was fully aware of Kateri's resistance to marriage and the persecutions which she had suffered on this account in her native village. Yet, in spite of this knowledge she hoped to convince Tekakwitha that marriage was the natural life for her. With her fluency of words and grace of manner so natural to an Indian with a point to make, Kateri's friend began by reminding her "dear sister" of their great obligation to the Lord for having led them from their wretched Mohawk homeland to the Mission at the Sault where Kateri had been able to strive for her salvation deliberately and unopposed. The foster sister went on to assure the young girl of how happy she and her husband had been to share their cabin with her. She added that Kateri had pleased them both by the wisdom of her conduct—a conduct which drew forth equal respect and admiration from the villagers. Sensitive as Tekakwitha was to the feelings and moods of every living soul, it is not hard to imagine her gratification upon hearing this compliment.

The woman continued. Their pleasure in her was indeed complete—except for one thing. Then, speaking in true Indian fashion, undisguised and direct, the sister finally blurted out the burden of her thoughts: Kateri must give serious consideration to a good, Christian marriage. The sister outlined the good reasons why every Iroquois girl married: a woman needed a husband in their

society whether to avoid the temptations to sin, or to provide the necessities of life. Of course, she would not have Kateri think for an instant that providing for her had been a burden, but her husband was getting on in years and they had a large family of their own to support. Furthermore, should ill-luck befall her and her husband, to whom would the hapless girl turn for help? She concluded by advising Tekakwitha to think well on these things and, as soon as possible, to prepare to face the realities of life and find herself a mate.

Father Cholenec, writing in 1696, gives the following account of Tekakwitha's response:

"Katherine was strangely surprised by her sister's discourse, which she had not anticipated, but because she was very honest and had great respect for her sister, she did not show the pain which this caused her. She even thanked her for her good advice, and added that as the affair was of such great importance she wished to think it over at leisure." *

Father Cholenec adds that Tekakwitha then sought him out, as she had so often done in moments of perplexity and complained bitterly of her sister's appeals.

No one knew better than Father Cholenec the finesse and tact with which Tekakwitha had met antagonism and criticism during her time at the Praying Castle, nor did anyone know better than he, the seriousness of this Indian girl's commitment to purity of life. Father Cholenec, indeed each missionary who came in contact with

* Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Fordham University, Document X, p. 275.

Tekakwitha, was inwardly moved to admiration and respect for her unyielding attitude toward matrimony. He knew the steadfastness of her soul, and did not expect, or even wish, to change her attitude toward marriage. Yet when she came to him with her problem, he made counter proposals. She must be made to see all possible alternatives and wrestle with them. Then, and only then, could she know her strength and weaknesses. Therefore Father Cholenec did not reject the arguments her sister presented; he told her that they had merit, and bade her to think well on them.

Katherine answered the priest immediately by saying that she belonged entirely to Jesus Christ, and it was impossible to change masters. As for her poverty? Her needs were few and she could take care of them; she felt no uneasiness whatsoever in this regard.

When the girl returned to the cabin, her sister pressed her for an answer. Kateri's reply was direct. She had renounced marriage, and wished to live as she was; she requested that her sister never again bring up the subject. In the meantime, she would work for her food; as for clothing, she had enough. Moreover, she promised not to be a burden to her sister and husband.

The sister was defeated and she knew it. Still, she would never understand Tekakwitha's reasoning. The girl's refusal to marry was contrary to any practice she had ever known. It was unnatural and un-Iroquois. Somehow and in some way, this stubborn, short-sighted Mohawk girl must be brought to her way of thinking. She *must* have a husband.

Presently, she thought of Anastasia. She would enlist her aid. Anastasia had known Tekakwitha longer than anyone else at the Praying Castle: indeed, until Kateri met Theresa, the two had been practically inseparable.

Surely, this old and loyal friend would be able to persuade the Mohawk maiden that matrimony was the only course for her to take; that all Indian girls succumbed to marriage sooner or later. Surely, Katherine Tekakwitha would be moved by Anastasia's advice.

It must have been an agonizing moment for Kateri when she was approached by her beloved Anastasia, particularly upon so sensitive a subject as marriage. That this woman should challenge her dearest ideals was no doubt a bitter experience for the young girl. Nevertheless, Katherine made the same firm and clear reply to Anastasia that she had made to her adopted sister. No man could have a place in her life, and never again was Anastasia to broach the subject of marriage.

The girl must have been reminded—unpleasantly to be sure—of those vexatious days at Turtle castle, where, on the banks of the Mohawk, as here, on the banks of the St. Lawrence, she was pitilessly pursued on the subject of marriage.

Again, Katherine sought the advice of Father Cholenec. So too did Anastasia. And each complained sorrowfully about the other.

The priest suggested that Katherine give the subject more consideration, perhaps three days, and that she pray earnestly and seek guidance from the Lord.

The unhappy girl agreed readily enough to his suggestion, but her mind had long since been made up and why wait? She returned to Father Cholenec within a short period of time and announced that she had disavowed any thought of marriage; that Jesus Christ was her Spouse, and she would happily "live in poverty and misery for His love." **

** Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, Doc. X: p. 279.

At this point, Father Cholenec gave up his role of the devil's advocate. He praised her decision and assured Katherine that henceforth he would defend her against anyone who again badgered her about matrimony. Furthermore, the missionary assured her that he and other missionaries would see to it that she would never be in want.

These words brought Kateri untold relief. At last, it seemed that she could look forward to contentment and peace. Nor was there less joy in the heart of Father Cholenec. The priest was not unmindful of the fact that Tekakwitha was not just another Iroquois convert: here at Praying Castle, he was convinced, lived the flower of the red race. Here in his own mission he had had the happiness of knowing the very first Indian whose soul seemed truly inspired by the grace of the Holy Ghost and whose life was in the process of becoming a crowning testimony to purity of body and mind.

As Father Cholenec discussed and evaluated Kateri's character with Anastasia in answer to her complaints that Katherine pursued her whims instead of heeding advice, the elderly Christian regretted her previous lack of understanding. In fact, Anastasia became one of the girl's staunchest advocates.

The preparations for the hunt went on. Kateri no longer beset by well-meaning tormentors, returned to her devotions. With Marie Theresa, she walked to the chapel to make the Act of Faith, said the rosary of the Holy Family, and continued the practice of chastisements. Inasmuch as only the old and very young ordinarily remained at the village, it is likely that both of Katherine's companions, Marie Theresa and Marie Skarichions, went on the hunt. Kateri herself remained in the village as she had wished.

She did so in spite of a plea from Father Cholenec

that her health might benefit from the hunt. For although she herself had done her best to hide her suffering from head aches, fever, and an upset stomach, it was quite evident to the priest and others who knew her that her health was on the wane. Father Cholenec suggested kindly that perhaps a change of air, plenty of sagamite, and fresh meat—none of which she would have at home—would be advisable.

The health of her own body, however, was not one of Katherine's concerns. Father Cholenec has left us a rueful interpretation of her reply:

"It is true, my Father, that my body is served most delicately in the forest, but the soul languishes there, and cannot satisfy its hunger. On the contrary, in the village the body suffers; but I am contented that it should be so, while the soul finds its delight in being near to Jesus Christ. Well then, I will willingly abandon this miserable body to hunger and suffering, provided my soul may have its ordinary nourishment." ***

Katherine's life in the village that winter may not have been an easy one, but it was an interlude she deeply welcomed. With few duties and distractions, it was almost like being cloistered. Like the Holy Sisters in Montreal, whom she had admired so extravagantly, she could now devote her thoughts almost exclusively to matters of the spirit. And like these Christian virgins who were dedicated to God by a promise of eternal chastity, she too determined that she would one day take the vow of perpetual chastity.

*** Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, Doc. XII: p. 368.

Chapter XIV

THE VOW

The missionaries who had known Katherine Tekakwitha were quick to sense her worth. Father de Lamberville had followed her development with high expectations ever since he had baptised her. Father Chauchetiere and Father Cholenec, who were with her at the Sault, had been fully aware of her spiritual growth.

After Father de Lamberville's first meeting with Katherine he confessed: "that he was deeply moved, and forthwith had a presentiment that the little pagan girl was predestined by God to accomplish great things." * Similarly, Fathers Chauchetiere and Cholenec acknowledged "their inability worthily to praise the purity of life and chastity which were special virtues of the Servant of God" **

* Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Fordham University, Summary p. 29.

** Ibid. Summary: P. 44.

The priests were not long alone in recognizing the singular grace of the young Indian girl. She had become more and more widely known at the Sault, and beyond and the perfection of her life began to have a telling impact on those who learned of her.

Attracted by her reputation, several of her tribesmen journeyed to Praying Castle and announced their intentions of adopting the faith of the Indian Maiden.

Time and again worshippers vied with each other to kneel beside her at the Communion rail, where they could steal covert glances at the slight figure bent over in a totally absorbed communion with God.

Why did the worshippers find it so desirable to be near Katherine Tekakwitha? They probably could not have given you any one answer. All they knew was that they were intuitively drawn to her presence; they felt the power of her goodness and found it good to be close to her.

Nor did the benefits flow altogether in one direction. Kateri also discovered that the villagers had much to teach her.

For by the time of Kateri's residence at Praying Castle, the missionaries were enjoying the fruits of their labors. Many of the new converts were zealous Christians who practised conspicuous penances, and their example was not lost upon Katherine.

Increasingly, Kateri had turned to the practice of penance as the truest means of expressing her love of God. Now, as she looked around her, she made mental notes of the self-inflicted austerities performed by some of the villagers and then proceeded to imitate them. In addition, she informed herself about the various types of penances performed by the saints and endeavored to copy these as well.

At the Sault, Kateri had an opportunity to see the wounds and lacerations that resulted from self-lashings and the wearing of sharp-pointed girdles. She saw women trudging in deep snow during severe weather, unmindful of discomfort as they recited their rosaries. She even heard about an overly zealous woman who chopped a hole in the ice-covered river, plunged in neck-deep and recited her rosary. But Katherine knew from having been reprimanded by her adviser, that extreme practises were not sanctioned by the Fathers.

It is hard for the modern mind to accept the idea of rigorous physical penances. We tend to regard them as both excessive and repulsive. In terms of Kateri's own background, however, it is not hard to understand why she was drawn to such practises. Cruelty and suffering were accepted by the Iroquois as part of life itself. Semi-starvation, for example, was a common condition of existence, and the Indian was expected to submit to it without a whimper. Torture was an accepted form of punishment. Simple enough, then, for the new convert to reason that if it was worthwhile to endure the torments of nature and custom in the interest of survival, it must be all the more worthwhile to suffer for the redemption of the eternal soul.

In spite of the priest's cautions, she burned parts of her body and wore the spiked iron girdle. Once, when she and Marie Theresa were together, Kateri, laden with wood, fell against the spikes. She continued her journey without a murmur. On other occasions she mixed ashes with her food, fasted on Wednesdays and Saturdays, walked barefooted in deep snow and on ice, and chastised her body. These challenges to her physical and spiritual strength had a profound meaning for the girl. Dedicated as she was in her faith, her intellect and imagination alike

leapt to embrace the significance of penance; it was holy practice for her. Her countrymen, for most of whom an unreserved dedication was a miraculous oddity, looked on amazed.

The Mohawk girl was never conscious that her way of life elevated her in the eyes of the villagers. Her mind and heart were focused on venerating the Blessed Virgin and her resolve to belong irrevocably to the Lord. What offering could she give, what further effort could she make to testify to her devotion?

Kateri was a poor girl, materially, and there was little tangible evidence she could give of her faith. But the nuns, in giving their total love, gave all, and this was the gift that Katherine longed to offer. She prayed that her life and her unblemished chastity might be acceptable in His sight, and she begged Father Cholenec to formalize her absolute surrender to God.

Once again this priest was obliged to deliberate on an important request from this Iroquois maiden. Again he scrutinized every facet of her life. A life of chastity was unheard of among the Indians. Yet in the Christian view, maidenhood was a holy state, and if it should be solemnly pledged to God, the vow so made was not broken without peril to the soul. Could this Mohawk girl sustain forever a life of virginity? Or would the best prove too great?

Father Cholenec reflected upon the qualities that had distinguished Kateri's life at the Sault: constancy to her chosen faith, appropriate behavior under the most trying circumstances, persistent progress in the precepts of Christianity, and above all, devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the Lord's Cross. In not one of these instances did he find her wanting. Indeed, such had been the pattern of conduct that the priest found himself believing that

this girl was inspired and would continue to be inspired by the spirit of God.

Katherine Tekakwitha was granted her request. Father Cholenec agreed to make the necessary preparations that she might take the vow of perpetual virginity.

For the date when this solemn occasion should take place, Kateri chose a significant feast day. In the words of Father Cholenec:

“It was the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1679, at eight o’clock in the morning, when a moment after Jesus Christ gave himself to her in Communion Katherine Tegakouita wholly gave herself to Him, and renouncing marriage forever promised Him perpetual virginity. With a heart aglow with love she implored Him to be her Spouse, and to accept her as His bride.” ***

For Katherine Tekakwitha this day of Annunciation was the most beautiful of her life. The making of her vows represented the consummation of a cherished dream on earth. And though she did not know it then, it was a prelude to a most happy occasion still to come.

*** Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, Summary: p. 47.

Chapter XV

HEROIC COURAGE

Community life at the Praying Castle was not unlike the life of any village today or yesterday. For the most part, the residents lived together in harmony. Individually, they knew periods of struggle and difficulty and moments of fulfillment.

From the time when she took her vow of perpetual chastity, however, Katherine Tekakwitha was increasingly detached from the uneven rhythms of the life around her. If seclusion had always been important to her, it was now even more so. Her existence had become a continuous act of communion with her God. What companionship she sought with Marie 'Theresa and Anastasia was for the purpose of shared prayer and conversation about matters of the spirit.

With her mind fixed on eternal objects, she subjugated her body to more and sterner demands. Her fastings became as rigorous as the barest necessities of survival

would permit. In her dress and in every daily habit of life, she observed a severe austerity.

The kind of mortification of the flesh which Katherine practised would have been taxing to the healthiest physique. In her own case, she was exacting the near impossible from a constitution ill adapted to meet even the ordinary exertions.

She was ill, and her illness was not a passing one. Each day found her laboring under a growing burden of pain. Fever and nausea were her constant attendants. The performance of every chore had become an act of will. Yet, she continued to rise each day at the sound of the four o'clock bell before dawn.

Once dressed, she trudged to church, took holy water, knelt near the altar, pulled her red blanket over her eyes and was one with God in prayer. Then, before leaving to perform her chores, she participated in two Masses. And this was only the beginning of her daily devotions.

Whenever possible during the day, Katherine revisited the cold, bleak church. At other times, she could be seen standing at the river bank with hands clasped in an attitude of prayer, her eyes fixed on the cross which stood there. About her chores in field or wood, she would pause to kiss the crucifix suspended around her neck.

Kateri did not pursue her stern regime with grim fanaticism. She was no frowning martyr. On the contrary, the spiritual solace which she received through rising above the limitation of her body seemed to divert her thoughts from her physical weaknesses. Father Cholenec, an eye witness throughout Katherine's presence at the Sault, makes this observation on her triumph over her ailments:

“Through all she had a gay and smiling countenance which would seem to belie that she suffered severely from her maladies.” *

She realized without self-pity that her days were numbered. When the grave was being prepared for one of her adopted sister's children, she pointed to the cross on the river bank and predicted that she herself would soon lie near it. That was all. She was too constantly in communication with the world beyond to regret her departure from the world she merely lived in.

By the summer of 1679, Kateri's condition became acute. Miraculously, she rallied—but never completely recovered even her former strength.

Kateri's grave sickness was a rude awakening to Marie Theresa. The Oneida girl was not only shocked to see Kateri so close to death, but she was also conscious-stricken. Often and for a long time past, she and Kateri had performed penances without the approval of their confessor. Both girls had realized, no doubt, that Father Cholenec would have condemned many of their acts as excessive.

Now Marie Theresa felt that Katherine's illness presented itself as a judgment against their secrecy. Guilt-ridden, she told Kateri that she felt compelled to confess to Father Cholenec, on behalf of them both, the details of their penances. Katherine equally as determined as Marie Theresa to be purged of any sin they might have unwittingly committed, agreed that her friend should talk to the priest.

* Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Fordham University, Document VIII, p. 179.

On her knees, Marie recited to Father Cholenec the full story of the secret mortifications. Always, she confided, it had been Katherine who could bear the greater test. When Kateri had recited half a "Hail Mary" while embers burned between her toes, Marie had not been able to summon the bravery to do likewise. Nor did Marie think that she could have continued to carry a huge bundle of wood, as Kateri had done after falling against the sharp spikes of the iron girdle she wore.

Father Cholenec was startled to learn of the extent of the girls' penances, and particularly of Kateri's. Yet though he knew that he must admonish, he could not help admiring the strength of spirit behind the act. He granted his forgiveness. As for Kateri, he tells us that he "regarded her devotions," by which we may assume that he at least attempted to impose some rules of moderation upon her conduct.

He was not, it was proved, entirely persuasive. By the beginning of the Lenten season in 1680, Katherine Tekakwitha felt compelled to put her body to another severe and painful test. She had conceived of a symbolic gesture—a way of identifying herself with Christ in His suffering on the cross. After everyone was asleep, she gathered thorns, and sprinkled them over the mat. Then, for three successive nights, she rolled and turned on this bed of thorns. Not one person was aware of her ordeal at the time, but it left its mark on Katherine. Her skin took on a death-like pallor and she was thin and fatigued. Her friends could not fail to notice this physical change, but they attributed it to her maladies.

Only Marie Theresa was not satisfied with the accepted explanation. She approached Kateri with quiet tact, and drew from her an admission of her suffering on the thorns.

Marie reacted with shock and concern. Didn't Katherine know that she had offended God by not getting the consent of her confessor before embarking on this unprecedented exercise?

Katherine was taken aback. Perhaps her friend was right and she had indeed sinned against her Lord. To set her mind at rest she found Father Cholenec at once and knelt before him with the confessional statement: "Oh Father, I have sinned." ** The priest, though inwardly breathless at the thought of the girl's remarkable fortitude, reproached her, and ordered her to burn the thorns. Obediently, Katherine Tekakwitha returned to her lodge and threw the thorns in the fire. They had served their purpose.

The girl's condition worsened. Finally, she was no longer able to continue her devotions at the church, but she was forced to remain on her bed. Frequently, she was racked by excruciating pain for which her only relief was to remain motionless.

Much of Katherine's suffering was in solitude. Often she was alone from dawn to dusk for the women worked in the field. Before they left the cabin, they left her a dish of sagamite and a bowl of water within reach. It was all that they could do. And for Katherine, it was enough. Alone on her bed, she found further opportunity to test her faith. Indeed, she welcomed this opportunity to think on Him whom she would shortly join.

Kateri was not altogether forsaken, however. The priests visited her. Sometimes they brought children to her bedside for her pleasure and their edification. Sometimes Father Chauchetiere brought rolls of bark with him on which he had painted scenes from the Old and New

** Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA: Doc. X: P. 295.

Testaments. On these occasions, he would unroll the bark and explain the pictures. Katherine's eyes would widen with interest, and weak though she was, she tried to raise herself for a closer look at the pictures.

Her spiritual hunger continued unabated; with each visit from the priests, she begged for more instruction. Though Katherine's life was ebbing just as surely as ice in the great river that flowed outside her lodge that April, her fleeting days brought blessings and care.

Chapter XVI

ETERNAL JOURNEY

*"On the seventeenth of April of the following year, 1680, the good Iroquois maiden, Katherine Tekakwitha, died in the odor of sanctity at the Sault Saint Louis, where she had been living for several years." **

Mother Juchereau of Saint Ignatious. (1713-1723). Annals of Hotel Dieu, Quebec.

Katherine Tekakwitha lay on her mat ravaged with pain and fever. Shadows were fast gathering around her.

Other shadows, from the past, must have taken their place on this scene of her final suffering: Father de Lamberville gently laying the white cloth of innocence on her head, and placing the white taper in her hand; the long flight from the abusive pagans to the friendly Christians;

* Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Fordham University, Document XV, p. 414.

her First Communion on Christmas Day at the Sault; the more recent vow of chastity. A child once again, she returned to the Mohawk village where her uncle and aunt had given her a home. Kindness—then persecution—Tekakwitha had known both, and all that she had known had been made meaningful at last through knowledge of her dear Savior. If she had one wish left, it was that others might know Him, too.

It was Holy Week, a fact that seemed more than coincidence to those Christians who watched over the dying girl as they returned from the services commemorating Christ's last days on earth. They filtered in and out of the cabin, the villagers of St. Sault, in hopes of being present on the occasions when she found strength enough to speak. Members of the Holy Family, two at a time as was their custom, kept vigil at her bedside; Anastasia and Marie Theresa were always near to minister to her comfort.

On that Monday, Katherine expressed her desire to do penance in memory of the Passion of Our Lord. Perhaps Father Cholenec would allow her to forego food on this significant day? But she was too ill for her wish to be granted. The priest tried to comfort her by saying that her intentions were pleasing to God, but the thought must supplant the deed.

On Tuesday morning, both Father Chauchetiere and Father Cholenec saw that Katherine was sinking rapidly. They decided that the time had come to administer the Last Sacraments. It was customary to carry the patient on a bark pallet to the church to receive this holy rite, but Katherine Tekakwitha was no ordinary person. With the approval of the villagers, the priests arranged that the Viaticum should be brought to her.

Katherine's face lighted up with joy at the thought of receiving her Savior, yet even at the point of death, she was concerned that the rites of the church should be performed with due propriety. Weakly, she summoned Marie to her bedside. In a hesitant voice she confided to her friend that her poverty was such that she had no suitable garment in which to receive the Holy Eucharist. Her devoted companion departed at once to her lodge, fetched a tunic for Katherine to wear, and dressed her for the Communion.

As Katherine's strength waned, the visitors to her bedside began arriving in increasing numbers. Drawn by a conviction that this was an extraordinary life now approaching a significant close, they left field and wood to gaze upon the girl and to solicit her prayers. Witnessing the solemn ceremony of the Last Sacrament, they had heard Katherine's confession and thanksgiving for all the graces God had granted her since Baptism—especially those graces she had received at the Mission of the Sault. And it seemed that their own lives gained new meaning from hers.

Father Cholenec, alarmed over Katherine's now rapid decline, thought it advisable to administer Extreme Unction immediately. But Katherine, as if she had a presentiment of the hour of her death, informed the priest that this would not be necessary until the following day.

There were visitors at Katherine's bedside who, in the estimation of Father Cholenec, could very well profit from the kind of message she could give them. He asked Katherine to encourage them with her words if she felt able. Courageously summoning all the strength at her command, she complied with the priest's request. In a voice barely audible, she spoke to her friends, separately

and collectively, about things unseen. They listened in awe and admiration and finally joined her in prayer. Then the villagers, many of them with tears in their eyes, moved discreetly away from the bed and left its occupant in sweet communion with the Son and Mother.

On Wednesday morning, Katherine was perceptibly worse. Anastasia remained close by; Marie wished to stay there also, but Katherine urged her to go to her duties in the field and promised to send for her in due time. Katherine kept her promise: she sent for Marie about ten o'clock in the morning. Shortly after Marie's return to her sick friend, Father Cholenec administered Extreme Unction. With solemn gentleness he touched her eyes, ears, nose, lips, hands and feet with oil and beseeched the Lord to pardon whatever sins or faults Katherine might have committed.

So many of the villagers had expressed a wish to be present at the moment of Tekakwitha's death that it was decided to summon them by bell. At three o'clock that afternoon, the bell tolled. And the chores of the day, the gathering of wood for the feast-days ahead, the work in the fields, the duties of the lodge, came to a sudden halt.

The villagers knelt in silent prayer at the bedside to which they had been summoned. Marie Theresa, weeping, sat with her arm around her friend's frail body. And difficult as it was for her to speak, Katherine found strength to bid farewell to this companion of her soul.

"I am leaving you. I am about to die. Always remember what we have done together since we knew each other; if you change I will accuse you before the tribunal of God. Take courage, despise the discourse of those who have no faith, when they wish to persuade you to marry;

listen only to the priests. If you cannot serve God here go to the Lorette Mission. Never give up mortification. I will love you in heaven, I will pray for you, I will assist you." **

After this Katherine spoke no more. She heard, as the onlookers could tell from the flickering changes of her facial expression brought forth by her response to the prayers of Father Cholenec and Father Chauchetiere who were kneeling beside her and keeping watch. And then it was time Father Cholenec delivered the final prayers for the dying.

The mood of those present was one of thanksgiving as much as grief. Father Cholenec rose to praise the dead girl, and encourage those gathered around her to imitate her example. The mourners kissed her hands, her blanket, her crucifix. Even the mat on which she lay was touched with reverence.

Presently, as the priests and villagers gazed upon the quiet body, a phenomenon occurred: Kateri's thin, scarred face became smooth and beautiful. Bewilderment, then awe spread over the kneeling group. The priests marveled at the miraculous transformation and declared that a blessed soul had left the earth to become a gift to Paradise.

Presently, two French settlers who happened to be at the Sault, entered the lodge. Without knowledge of Kateri's death, they exclaimed about the beautiful, sleeping Indian girl. The fact that she was dead was hard for them to believe. Once convinced, however, they declared that her body should not be borne to her grave on a bark pallet, as was customary, but should be enclosed in

** Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA: Doc.: VIII: P. 204.

a wooden coffin, such as the white man used. They knelt asking to be remembered in her prayers, then rushed off to fashion her coffin.

Though Katherine's burial was to follow the white man's traditions, the customs of the Indians were not forgotten. Anastasia, Marie Theresa, and Kateri's adopted sister prepared the remains according to the ways of their people. They oiled her body with bear's grease and dressed her in new garments and moccasins. They arranged her hair, which was as glossy as a blackbird's wing, in two braids. And Tekakwitha, who had observed the laws of poverty in her dress, went to her grave clothed in the pride that her friends took in her life.

Villagers crowded into the church on Holy Thursday to pay their last respects to Katherine Tekakwitha. Then they followed her remains to the foot of the cross on the river bank to that spot where she had so often stood in prayer—the spot she had predicted weeks before would be her resting place. That it would not in fact be her final resting place, and that the work of her life was by no means ended—these things were not yet known.

Chapter XVII

MIRACLE WORKER

Katherine Tekakwitha's reputation as a prudent, obedient girl resulted in an upsurge of religious fervor at the Sault. Not only the French and Indians, but the missionaries as well, responded to the power of the Indian Maiden. They knelt at her grave to invoke her aid. And, as the word of her life and continuing influence spread farther abroad, devotees from Montreal and Quebec made pilgrimages to her grave.

For Kateri's death had not been an ending. It was followed by a series of circumstances which provoked wonder and helped to spread the glory of her name beyond the Mission at the Sault. In life, her example had been notable. In death, her spirit carried on.

Anastasia was the first to be favored. A few days after Kateri's death, she was aroused from her sleep by a voice which called "Mother" and bade her to rise up and look. It was Katherine's voice.

Anastasia sat up quickly and looked in the direction

of the speaker. She saw before her a body enveloped in a bright light and she recognized Kateri's face which shone with exceptional beauty. The apparition spoke again, and directed Anastasia's attention to the beautiful cross she carried saying that she loved it still in Paradise and wished that those in her cabin loved it and believed in it as much as she. Then suddenly and mysteriously, Kateri and the brilliantly lighted cross disappeared.

On a second occasion, Katherine Tekakwitha appeared to Father Chauchetiere. Father Cholenec gives us this version of Father Chauchetiere's account:

"The priest saw at her right a church turned upside down; at her left some Indians burning at the stake." *

The meaning of this was to become clear when the Mission church was overturned during a violent storm and an Indian man and two women were captured by raiding Iroquois, returned to their native land (now New York State), and burned at the stake. The fulfillment of Katherine's prophecy provided her admirers with still greater reason to believe in her power to mediate between them and God.

Kateri appeared again to Father Chauchetiere. In this vision the priest interpreted her message to mean that he should make a portrait representing the Indian girl revering the cross held in her hand. This he did in 1681.

And down through the years, artists have attempted to capture the spirit of Kateri Tekakwitha in stone and bronze and on canvas.

* Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA, *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Fordham University, Document XIII, p. 406.

In increasing numbers, men and women began to report favors and cures they had received from God through Katherine Tekakwitha's intercession. Distraught mothers made pilgrimages to Katherine's tomb with their sick children asking God for cures through the power of Katherine Tekakwitha. Missionaries, Indians, and French colonists came to share a common belief in her good offices.

As the years have passed, many more miraculous cures have been attributed to Katherine Tekakwitha. Today her fame is world-wide. Individuals from all over Canada and the United States of America join with travelers from across the sea in addressing themselves to Kateri in the hope of spiritual and material aid. Prayers are made not only to obtain favors, but in thanksgiving for favors received. For almost three hundred years, men and women have implored help from God out of their conviction in Kateri's power to intercede for them and priests have knelt at her grave seeking cures for themselves as well as for members of their congregations.

In one of Father Cholenec's biographical sketches of Katherine Tekakwitha, written in 1715, he gives us an idea of Katherine's influence after her death:

"She began to be famous for miracles about six months after her death, and in a short time she scattered very many of them all over the Canadian scene. Earth taken from her grave was as prompt a remedy for whatever illness as it was common. The French from every part of the colony flocked hither to give thanks for favors from Katherine and to venerate her relics kept in our church. Her mere pictures, just the invocation of her name, only the promise of a pilgrimage to her relics, water drunk

from her cup, her clothing, her utensils, the touching of anything she used, all are effectual for persons suffering from whatever disease you will. Furthermore, letters from France tell of her aid to many there who besought her." **

With the growing evidence of Kateri's intercession, it is little wonder that the Indians and French in Canada have come to regard her as their patroness before God. Nor is it surprising that just four years after her death, Father Cholenec disinterred her remains for safekeeping in a room in the Mission Church where the sacred utensils and vestments were kept. Later, Katherine's bones were deposited in a sealed casket and placed in a parlor off the sacristy where they rest today. This location, at the present site of Caughnawaga on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, is about six miles from Katherine's original tomb.

The original cross over her grave had to be replaced several times because of decay and wind damage. Finally, in 1890 through the generosity of the Reverend Clarence A. Walworth of St. Mary's Church, Albany, New York, an imposing memorial to Katherine Tekakwitha was erected. Over her tomb a large granite urn, protected by a rustic roof and crowned by a towering cross, commemorates her first resting place. On the stone is inscribed:

Katherine Tekakwitha

April 17, 1680

Onkweonweke Katsitsiio Teotsitsianekaron

meaning

Fairest flower that ever bloomed among true men.

** Positio: KATHERINE TEKAKWITHA: Doc. VIII: P. 407.

Atop a hill overlooking the quiet-flowing river of the Mohawks on the site of the Mohawk Village of Ossernenon—now Auriesville, N.Y.—is the National Shrine of the North American Martyrs. Here, among shrines dedicated to declared saints, Katherine Tekakwitha is revered and prayers are recited for her beatification. Across the Mohawk River was the fortified Castle of Caughnawaga—now Fonda, N.Y. In 1938, a monument to the memory of Katherine Tekakwitha was unveiled on the site where once stood St. Peter's Chapel.

In 1943, His Holiness Pope Pius XII, authorized the Decree giving Katherine Tekakwitha the title—"Venerable." Believers and friends of Kateri now look forward to the day when her cause for beatification and canonization will have come to pass.

This miracle of the Mohawks, born within the United States of America and nurtured on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, has glorified not only her own race and her native land, but her adopted country Canada as well. In the words of Christ: "Ye shall be born anew." And in truth, Katherine Tekakwitha was born anew—both in life and in death.

—*To Katherine living in the twentieth century*—

You too, can be born anew. Of course I don't mean that you are likely to be committed to God in the sense that Katherine Tekakwitha was. Few people are so highly endowed spiritually as to qualify for this honor. But there is a divine spark in you which is yours to nurture and develop as best you can.

When you join the church, you declare your acceptance of Jesus Christ; when you say the Apostles' Creed, you not only affirm your allegiance to Jesus Christ, but you also affirm your belief in the communion of saints; when you kneel at the altar rail, you intensify your belief in a common Lord; when you have compassion, patience, and sympathy for all creatures, be they beast, bird, or man, you manifest your relationship with Christ. Insofar as your Christian belief is sincere, you *do* possess sacred qualities, you *are* born anew—to a degree. And like the Mohawk Indian girl, you too can order and direct your life pattern; you too can possess prudence and obedience.

If Katherine Tekakwitha's story has helped you to see how and why, then it has served a purpose she would have warmly sanctioned.

