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# *This is Kateri*



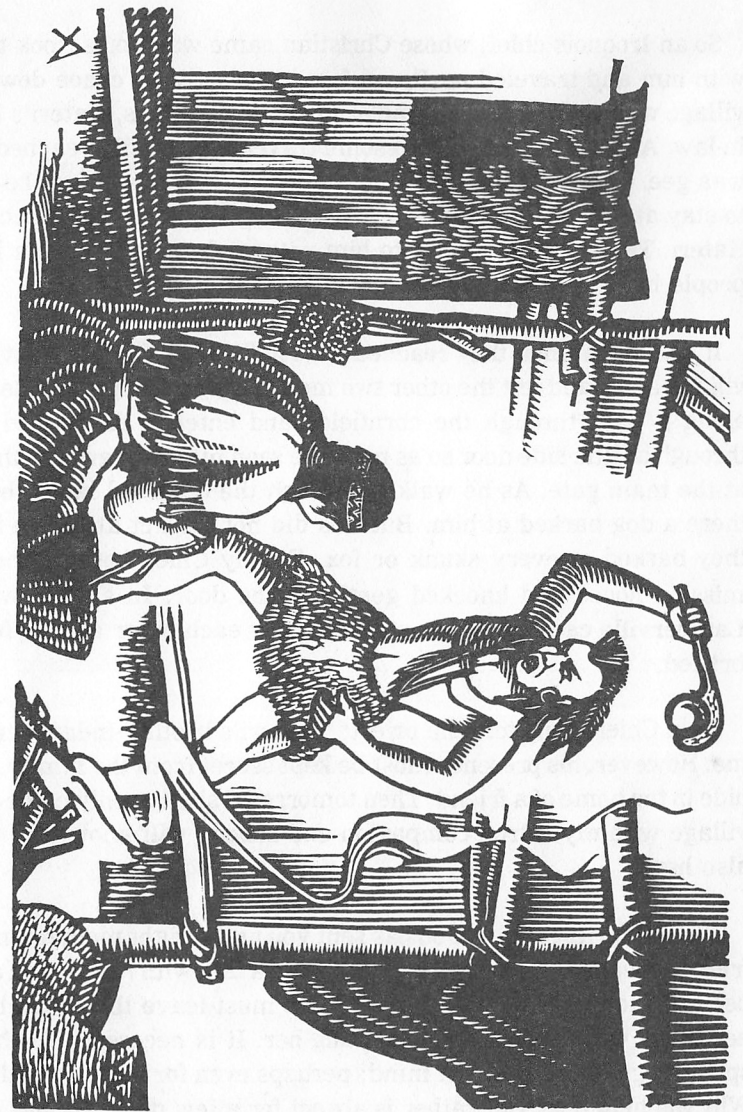
by Fr. Cormac Antram, O. F. M.

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Then the children of the village began to mock her as she walked along. They would spit in front of her and say to her: "You dirty Christian!" Also young men would wait for her along the way as she walked to church, suggesting that she come into the woods with them and enjoy the pleasures of love. Sometimes a man, acting like a drunkard, would threaten her or try to pull her off the path. She tore herself away from them and ran to the church, arriving there trembling and out of breath to join the congregation. Kateri soon realized that all of these happenings were being deliberately planned, but she never mentioned them to the priest.



After her Baptism, Easter Sunday, April 5, 1676, such a storm of persecution fell upon Kateri that her life was threatened.



But news traveled fast from village to village, and soon even the Christian Indians who lived up in the "Village of Prayer," 150 miles to the north, had heard snatches of stories about the suffering being inflicted on Kateri. They decided to find out if it was true, and if so, to help her.

So an Iroquois chief, whose Christian name was Louis, took two men with him and traveled partly on foot and partly by canoe down to the village where Kateri lived. One of the men was Onas, Kateri's brother-in-law. After two weeks of tiresome travel they finally reached Ga-na-waa-gee. Onas did not want to be seen by his father-in-law, so he decided to stay at the home of a friend and arrange for a secret meeting with Kateri. There she could talk to him without fear and tell him how her people had been treating her.

It was night when they reached the village. Chief Louis went into the village alone and left the other two men in the canoe. Quietly he walked along a path through the cornfields and entered the walled village through a little side door so as not to be seen by the guards in the tower at the main gate. As he walked through the deserted lanes, here and there a dog barked at him. But this did not attract attention because they barked at every skunk or fox. Finally Chief Louis came to the mission house and knocked gently on the door. In a little while Fr. Lamberville came to the door. Both knew each other and joyfully embraced.

Then Chief Louis told the priest: "Kateri's brother-in-law came with me. However, his presence must be kept secret from the family. He will hide in the home of a friend. Then tomorrow I shall openly come into the village with my Huron companion and nobody will know that Onas is also here."

Then the priest said: "God has sent you at the right moment, my dear friend. It was only two days ago that I had a talk with Kateri and advised her to go to the 'Village of Prayer.' She must leave this place because her aunts will never stop tormenting her. It is necessary for her own spiritual good and peace of mind; perhaps even for her physical safety. Will you help her? Her father is absent for a few days. He has gone to trade for supplies. Maybe while he is gone you can arrange to take her away from here."

"Yes, Father, we can arrange her flight," Chief Louis replied.

Then Father vested for Mass. As soon as he arrived at the altar, the voices of 20 children suddenly burst out into the opening song of the Mass for Easter: "I have risen, and I am with you, alleluia." (Perhaps even at this time Mass was being offered in the language of the Iroquois Nation, a special privilege which they had obtained from Rome several centuries before Mass in the vernacular was allowed to the world at large.)

Back in those days, only those who were baptized were allowed to be present for Mass. As Tekakwitha witnesses the Mass for the first time, tears of joy rolled down her cheeks and dropped upon the folds of her white baptismal veil.



Although Tekakwitha had taken the name Kateri as her baptismal name, her relatives refused to call her by that name. As the weeks went on, her peace and joy seemed to irritate her two aunts. Finally their anger could not contain itself any longer. One Sunday, when Kateri returned from Mass, her step-mother yelled at her: "You are late for work! Your aunt is already down in the cornfields. Eat your breakfast, then hurry after us!"

Tekakwitha was shocked. "But mother," she said, "it is Sunday. You know that I am not allowed to work in the fields today. It would be against the commandment of God." But her step-mother just screamed at her and said: "This is just an excuse for the lazy Christians! If you refuse to work—alright. But neither shall you eat!" She then took the stew from the stove and poured it into a bowl which was then put into her own basket. As she was leaving the house she said to Tekakwitha: "After you have fasted the whole day you will be willing to work next Sunday, I am sure!"

But Kateri would not give in, and continued to refuse to work in the fields on Sunday. For the next few months she had to spend Sundays without a meal. While her family enjoyed a big meal every Sunday evening, Kateri just sat on the floor by her bedside, weak and dizzy with hunger.



Tekakwitha listened carefully to all of this teaching and Fr. Lamberville was surprised at how well she understood it. He also heard from the other Catholic Indians that they had never seen Tekakwitha give a bad example to anyone, nor take part in any of the sinful habits of those who lived around her. So Fr. Lamberville decided that she could be baptized after only eight months of instructions. It would happen on Easter Sunday. Tekakwitha received the news with great joy and prepared herself with daily prayer for the great day.

On Easter Sunday, April 18, 1676, a small procession moved through the lanes of the village towards the little church at the edge of the forest. Tekakwitha, with two other girls who were to receive Baptism with her, walked at the head of the group. They wore blouses and skirts of deerskin, with white woolen shawls. A crowd had gathered in front of the church to watch the ceremony but Tekakwitha's uncle and aunts were not among them. They remained at home.

The Christian Indians had generously loaned their own treasures to decorate the church. Soft and shiny beaver pelts hung from the rough wooden walls of the chapel, the floor was covered with rugs of bearskins and painted buffalo hides. Long strands of coral and colored beads hung from the ceiling around the altar. Flowers and blooming twigs adorned the altar itself.

As soon as the procession arrived at the entrance of the church, Fr. Lamberville was standing there to greet them. There he questioned them as to whether they were willing to turn away from the devil and all his works. He also questioned them as to whether they really believed all of the holy teachings of the Church.

Tekakwitha had chosen the name Katherine as her Christian name. In the language of her own people it was pronounced "Kateri." When Fr. Lamberville had finished with the question part of the ceremony, the procession then moved inside the church. On one side was a group of boys and girls who were the well-trained choir.

Finally the great moment of Baptism arrived. Tekakwitha bowed her head over the large bowl and the priest poured the water over her forehead. He said: "Kateri, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Carrying a lighted candle, Kateri then walked to her place in the first bench and remained in deep prayer until the other two girls had received the sacrament also.

"Tomorrow I'll come with the Huron and we will talk over all the details." Then Chief Louis, in his soft moccasins, walked unnoticed out of the village and back to his waiting companions.

After Mass on the following morning, Kateri was told that her escape would be that night. She was to take only a blanket with her. The priest gave her a sealed envelope to give to the priest at the "Village of Prayer." It read: "Kateri Tekakwitha now comes to join your community. You will soon realize that she is a very precious child of God. It is my hope that, under your direction and guidance, she will continue to grow in a holy way from day to day."

Throughout the whole day Kateri did her usual chores. She cooked the meals, carried water, collected dry wood in the forest and ground the corn into meal. Finally night came and all the people of the village went to sleep, except the two guards at the tower of the main gate.

Kateri was so excited that she could sleep only off and on. Her heart was filled with joy, but also with sadness. With joy because she would be living with other Christians and would be able to follow Christ in complete freedom. With sadness because she had to leave the beautiful Mohawk Valley where she had grown up. How she loved this valley, with its gentle hills, green meadows and blue-green waters!

It was about two hours after midnight when she heard the hoot of an owl from the woods beyond the village wall. Then came a second hoot, and then a third—at equal intervals. This was the signal! She rose, slipped into her moccasins and covered her shoulders with a blanket. Slowly she made the Sign of the Cross on herself. Then she quietly walked past her sleeping aunts, pushed the bearskin aside at the door and slipped outside.

A few feet from the door her dog came up, wagging his tail, ready to accompany her on her walk. But she reached down, patted him on the head and ordered him in a whisper to lie down. Kateri then made her way through the village and out through the tiny door in the wall. Soon she was at the edge of the forest where two men stepped out of the brush. She did not know the men although one of them was Onas, her brother-in-law, whom she had never seen. Silently the three hurried along the path that led down to the river.



At the river a canoe lay hidden in the shadows of the overhanging willows. Onas and the Huron named Jacob helped Kateri into the canoe. A few minutes later they were on their way downstream, staying close to the shore to avoid the open moonlight. Soon a curve in the river brought them out of sight of the village. Now they took to the middle of the river. Pushed along by the swift current and the powerful strokes of the men, the canoe shot through the water with great speed. The men kept silent, only whispering to one another now and then. To speak aloud would be dangerous because the water magnified the sound of human voices and carried them a long distance. Any Iroquois camping in the woods could then have easily heard them.

Two hours later, as the early dawn began to brighten the eastern sky, they landed at a place where a small stream emptied into the river. There they hid the boat and walked a short distance through the dense forest. Then they sat down behind some bushes. No fire was lit. Jacob, the Huron, opened his bundle and served them lumps of dried corn meal and pieces of hardened maple syrup. Then, after a drink from the fresh, cool springs nearby, they wrapped themselves in their blankets and laid down on the moss for a few hours of much-needed rest.



Meanwhile Kateri's step-father was away on a trading trip. But when Kateri's aunts awoke the next morning and saw her missing, they sent the fastest runner in the villate to the trading post at Skenedada (the name today is Schenectady, New York). This was where the chief had gone to trade his furs for food and supplies. There the runner found the chief. He had completed his trading, after which the trader had offered him as much whiskey as he wanted. So the chief was sitting at the table half-drunk when the runner arrived. He rushed up to the table and said: "Tekakwitha is gone. Yesterday morning her bed was empty. Nobody has seen her since."

fireplace, she calmly looked at her step-father and told him of her decision—that she had decided to become a Christian and ask for Baptism.

As soon as Tekakwitha had said this, her aunts yelled out protests and threats against her. But her step-father just sat there in silence. Actually he had suspected that someday Tekakwitha might do this very thing. After all, he had thought, wasn't her own mother a "Frenchie," an Algonquin who had been raised by Frenchmen and had become a Christian at an early age? He stared at the girl and she kept looking back at him. At any moment she expected him to fly into a rage. But he did not speak at all. What he saw in her eyes made him change his mind. Angry as he was within, still he knew that he could never change her mind. He saw that this adopted daughter of his was not only the child of a gentle Algonquin mother, but also was like her Mohawk father—that she had a strong will, and courage to go with it, which nothing could bend or break. But still he had a plan which he hoped would make her change her mind. For the time being, however, he would keep his plan secret.

He finally turned his eyes from her and continued smoking his pipe in silence. Then he turned to the two women, who still were carrying on a conversation of ridicule about the girl, and said sharply to them: "You have no brains. Shut your mouths and keep them shut! There will not be another word about this from either of you!"

The next day Tekakwitha left for the mission to receive her first religious instructions. They let her go without any protest or comment. The only demand her aunts made was that she must not neglect any of her duties at home. This meant that she would have to rise much earlier in the morning in order to do all of her chores so that she could attend the religious instructions every morning and evening.

Fr. Lamberville explained to her our belief in God; how the first man and woman turned against God, but how God still loved us. God promised that someday a Savior would come down to earth to help all people get to heaven. God also gave us the Ten Commandments to live by. Finally, after a long time had passed, the Son of God was born among us. He taught us by His holy words and example. Then He offered His own life on the cross to pay back for the sins of all men. He opened heaven again for us.

way. I am eighteen years old and must make my own decision. He will surely try to stop me, he might even punish me; but God will help me to be strong."

All doubts from the priest's mind had now been removed. He said to her: "Tekakwitha, as soon as your foot is healed you may come to instructions. I shall pray to God to give you strength and to draw you to Himself so you may know and love Him and belong to Him forever." With a smile and a friendly greeting the priest turned to continue on his way.

"Thank you," was all that Tekakwitha could say. She had never been so happy in all her life. She limped back to bed, covered her face with both hands and cried for joy.



Tekakwitha kept her decision a secret until she would be able to take off her bandages and walk again. Meanwhile, her step-father and her aunts were all puzzled over the change in her behavior. She seemed to be more happy than she had been in a long time. One evening the chief teased her by saying: "What's the matter with you, Tekakwitha? You have looked so very happy lately. Could it be that you have fallen in love?"

Tekakwitha just smiled, but then her smile quickly vanished when she remembered that she would have to endure the chief's anger once she had made known the true reason for her happiness. Every night she begged God to help her in the struggle which lay ahead.

Three weeks later she was finally able to take off the bandages from her foot. Then that evening, while everyone was sitting around the

The young Mohawk runner told the chief that Chief Louis, who had come from the "Village of Prayer," was still in the village after Kateri disappeared. Then he left alone for Oneida. Some scouts followed him, but he didn't pick up Kateri anywhere along the river. But there was a Christian Huron who had come with him and who now has disappeared. The Mohawk runner did not mention Onas because he had remained hidden during his visit at the village.

Upon hearing this news, the chief became very angry. The sudden news had the effect of clearing his mind and he began to think straight, whereas before he had been sitting there in a half-stupor. "That Huron dog has snatched away my daughter and taken her to the 'Village of Prayer,'" he said as he crashed his fist down on the table, upsetting the whiskey bottle. "Come," he said, "they cannot have gotten too far up the path which leads to the great lake. We will catch them."

Within three hours they had reached the place where the path takes off from the river bank. There the chief told the young Mohawk to remain with the canoe while he himself went up the path looking for them. By this time Kateri and her two companions, after snatching a few hours' sleep, had proceeded on up the path and were actually only six miles away at that moment. They could not travel fast as Kateri was tired and the men were carrying bundles of blankets and food, together with their guns, an axe and a kettle. However, Onas had figured out what might happen. Kateri's step-father would start out after them, he thought, as soon as he heard of the escape. This being so, he would reach them that very afternoon. So Onas came up with a plan.

He told Jacob and Kateri to keep walking up the path. He would follow them quite a distance behind and keep a sharp lookout for the chief. "If I see him coming," he said, "I will fire a single shot. This will be a warning for you to leave the path and hide in the forest. Keep hidden until you see me walking by on the path. Then you, Jacob, will give three calls of the catbird, and I shall join you in your hide-out."

"But if you fire your gun," Jacob objected, "the chief will hear it. I don't think your plan is a good one."

To which Onas countered: "I want him not only to hear the shot but to see me. He has never seen me even though he is my father-in-law. He

will just think that I am a Mohawk hunter. In fact, nobody knows that Kateri is traveling with two men. They all think that she escaped with only you as her companion."

Then they all knelt down and prayed to God that everything would turn out alright. Onas then fell behind while the other two went on ahead. Onas, a born actor, walked slowly, stopping every now and then, turning in all directions and gazing searchingly into the woods as if looking for something to hunt.

In about an hour his sharp eyes detected someone approaching below. He waited until he could see that it was the chief from the way he dressed. He then stepped aside into the bushes. As the chief came close, Onas turned his back to the path, looked intently up at a big fir tree and fired. This startled the chief, but then he noticed that it was only a Mohawk hunting. "Did you see a girl with a Huron on this path?" the chief yelled to Onas.

"A girl?" asked Onas. He turned in every direction as if looking for her. "Is she here in the forest?" Then he continued with an embarrassed grin: "I am a good marksman, but an evil spirit took the shape of a squirrel to fool me. I hit him, I'm sure. But who can kill a spirit?" The chief looked at him and said: "You idiot!" Then he continued hurriedly up the path.

Meanwhile Kateri and Jacob had heard the shot and hid behind a fallen pine tree. A while later they saw the chief walking quickly up the path and looking straight ahead. Then about ten minutes later they saw Onas coming up the path, still playing the part of a hunter looking for squirrels or deer. Jacob rose and gave the call of the catbird, repeating it twice. Onas raised his gun and slowly walked into the forest in the direction of the bird call. Soon he saw the two hiding behind the fallen tree. "Thanks be to God," he said upon seeing them. "Everything went fine so far."

They remained behind the fallen tree and the two men urged Kateri to lay down and get some sleep. Meanwhile the two men kept a lookout for the chief's return. Three hours later, when the sun was just about to set, they saw him approaching. He had given up the pursuit; tired, his head bowed, he walked back down the trail.

Onas awakened Kateri as she had requested. At the sight of her step-

Father Lamberville was going from house to house, talking with the sick and old and giving them medicine. At noon he came to the cabin of the chief. He knew that the chief did not welcome him so he was going to pass by even though the door was open. But suddenly he heard a voice from within calling out "Raa-kée-nee," which was the Mohawk word for priest. It was Tekakwitha calling. Even though she was naturally shy, she suddenly felt a great desire to talk to the priest. How often in the past she had felt like talking to the priest, but never dared for fear of her uncle! But now all fear and shyness left her. She felt a wave of strength and courage surge through her whole body. Disregarding the pain of her foot, she got up, stumbled to the door and cried out again: "Raakee-nee."

Tekakwitha trembled with excitement as she saw the priest turn around and come to the door. His eyes showed surprise but he spoke to her in his same friendly voice: "Yes, my child?" At the same time he noticed her bandaged foot and said: "Are you suffering? Shall I call one of the women to help you?"

"It's not my foot," she said with a grateful smile. "Raakeenee, I want to know and love the one true God. I want to become a follower of Christ!"

The priest was greatly surprised. He knew that this girl really meant what she said. He remained silent awhile and just thought. Then he said: "I know, my child, that your intention is honest and serious. Are you sure that you will have the strength to carry it out? How did you come to this decision?"

Then Tekakwitha told him of how her own deceased Algonquin mother had been a Catholic before she was captured by the Mohawks. She described how her mother's great friend, Anastasia, had often spoken about Jesus. Tekakwitha said that ever since she was a child she desired to know the true God and to become a Catholic.

The priest then said: "If your father should forbid you to become a Catholic, would you still go ahead against his will and stand firm by your decision?"

A smile came over Tekakwitha's face. She thought of all that she had already had to suffer. Then she said: "Raakeenee, my father knows that I was never disobedient to him; but as to religion, I have to go my own



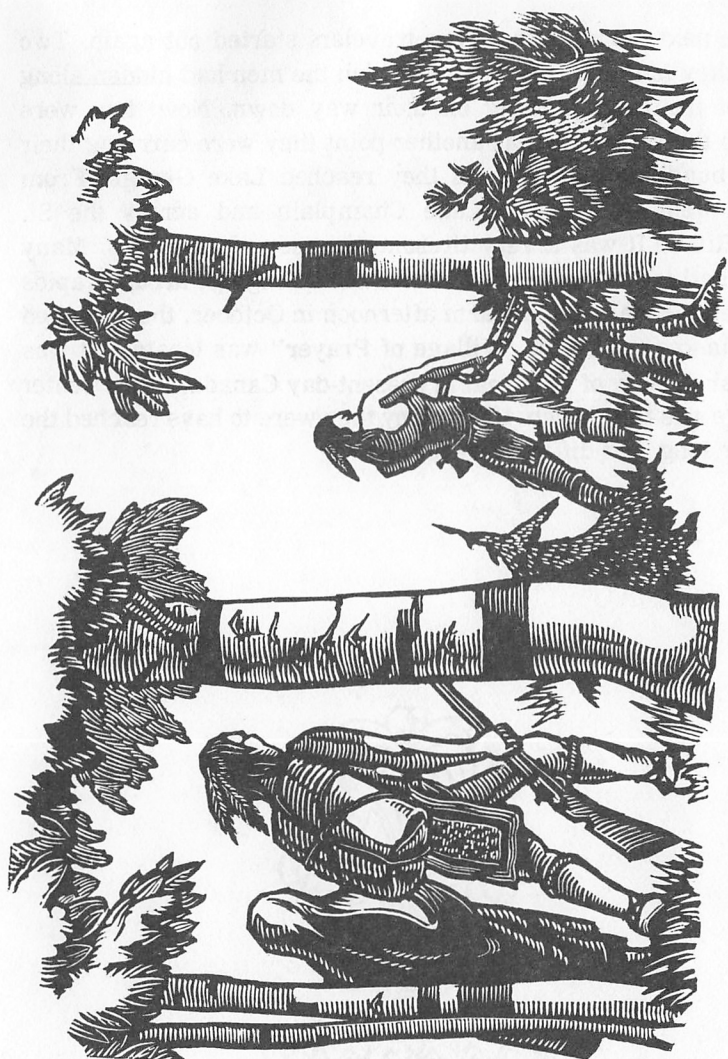


Kateri was skillful with her hands and learned to make many beautiful and useful articles.

father she could not hold back the tears. She knew that he loved her, in spite of his rough ways. She thought of how often he would be lonesome for her and wish her back. She felt sorry for him, but her sorrow would have been even greater if she had realized that never again would she see him in this world.

Early the next morning the three travelers started out again. Two days later they found the other canoe which the men had hidden along the bank of the Hudson River on their way down. Now they were paddling up the river. Then at another point they were carrying their canoe and bundles overland until they reached Lake George. From there they went up through Lake Champlain and across the St. Lawrence River. It was a very tiresome journey of 150 miles. Many times they had to carry the canoe and their belongings around rapids and waterfalls. Finally, on a warm afternoon in October, they reached Kaa-naa-wáa-kee where the "Village of Prayer" was located. It was situated near the city of Montreal in present-day Canada. In the center of the village was the church. How happy they were to have reached the end of their long and difficult journey!





By advice of the missionary and aided by Christian Indians,  
Kateri escaped from her village and found peace at the "Village  
of Prayer."

By this time the number of Catholic Christians kept growing in the village. Over twenty families were now Catholics, not including those thirty who had left with the converted chief, "The Great Mohawk," for the north. But life was very hard for these new Christians. The witchcraft people stirred up hatred against them. And sometimes, when some of the men got drunk, they ran through the village with their tomahawks, yelling horrible threats against the Catholics and the priest.

A new priest came in 1675 to replace the 38 year old Father Boniface, whose health had been broken through hardship and hard work. This new priest, Father Lamberville, was very friendly with the people. He used to go from house to house, speaking cheerfully to all inhabitants, consoling the sick and giving instructions. There were only a few houses in the village which would not admit him, and one of them was the house of the chief, Tekakwitha's step-father.

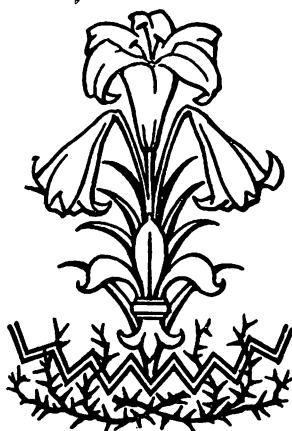


Tekakwitha was now eighteen. One day, while gathering firewood, she caught her foot in the root of a tree. In falling she suffered a serious injury to her left foot. For many days she had to sit or lie in bed, her leg covered with herbs and wrapped in deer skin. During this time she spent her time sewing, carving wooden utensils or making aprons from the leaves of corn husks.

One beautiful summer day Tekakwitha was home all alone. Her uncle had gone hunting and both aunts were down in the cornfields. It had not rained for two weeks and all the people, including the children, were carrying water from the river to the garden. The village was deserted except for the sick and the feeble old.

Then Tekakwitha's aunt stepped forward and handed Tekakwitha a nicely carved wooden bowl. "Here, child," she said, "fill it with sagamite and serve it to this worthy young man!" Tekakwitha felt very uneasy. With trembling fingers she held the ladle as she scooped up the tasty dish. She thought to herself: "Why is everyone looking so solemn, why this unusual procedure?" Suddenly, her eyes widened as she turned pale. Now she realized the whole scheme. She turned around and stared at her uncle and aunts with a long look. Everyone could see the hurt expression on her face. Then the bowl slipped from her fingers and fell to the floor. Tekakwitha then turned and walked from the house and out into the night. She ran down to the river bank and hid among the corn stalks.

Meanwhile, the young man knew that both he and Tekakwitha had been tricked. He felt sorry for her and was angry over the mean attempt of her family to force her into marriage. He then left the house without a word, his parents silently following him. The chief and his family hung their heads in shame and embarrassment.



After the plan failed, Tekakwitha's aunts acted very mean to her. They were always scolding her. Then when her step-father was away on hunting trips, they made her do very hard work from dawn to dusk. Once her step-father came home early from a hunting trip. He discovered how cruelly they were treating her and it made him very angry. He threatened to divorce his wife and to drive both women out of his house unless they stopped treating her so badly.

Every morning the bell in the church steeple rang at 4:30. This was to awaken anyone who wanted to attend the first Mass at 5:00. Perhaps this Mass was attended mostly by men who wanted to get an early start on their work in the fields or hunting. Then a second Mass was at 7:00 a. m. It was attended by other adults in the village, mostly women. Finally, the third Mass was at 8:00 a. m. and was for the children. A catechism instruction always followed.

During Mass the Indians would sing hymns in their own language to match the different parts of Mass. Also the prayers they would say during Mass would be sung instead of recited. Even their daily prayers, such as the Rosary, the Creed, the Ten Commandments were always sung. The Mohawks loved singing. They gladly memorized the words and sang them, not only in church but also while working in the fields.

Since the Indians could not read, the priests used large, brightly colored pictures in their instructions. Three times every day the church bell rang, calling everyone to private prayer. Everyone stopped wherever they were or whatever they were doing to recite or sing the Our Father or Hail Mary.

Every year they kept a day of celebration at the beginning of the planting season in the spring and at the end of the harvest. Before the planting started, a procession of children carried baskets of seeds to the church for the priest's blessing. After the blessing of seeds there would be Mass. Then after Mass there would be a procession down to the fields, during which the people would sing hymns and prayers. The priest would then bless the fields using holy water and the prayers of the Church.

At harvest time in October there would be a Mass of thanksgiving. During the Mass the people would bring offerings of corn, beans, pumpkins and fruits to the altar. This food would later be distributed among the helpless old people who had no one to provide for them. During the rest of the day there would be joyful feasting, visiting from home to home and various races and games. Before sunset they would all meet again in church for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The chiefs of the village agreed that if anyone took part in fights, cursing and the drinking of alcohol, they would immediately be expelled from the village. The priests also did not want the Indians to witness the faults and vices of many Frenchmen who lived in that part of the



country. For this reason no White Man was allowed to settle in the "Village of Prayer." They could come only as visitors.

The annual harvest always produced more food than the people would seem to need. Much of the food was used to feed the many visitors who were always coming. The people considered it their duty to treat every visitor kindly. Soon the word spread of how well these people received everyone. So hunters came in from near and far, singly or in groups, to remain a few days as guests of the "Village of Prayer." In a single year over 800 visitors came, most of them staying three days. No wonder the large harvest which the 300 families had worked so hard for was almost gone by May or June! The people then shared their remaining provisions, living for months on berries, roots, wild fruit and uncertain supplies of meat and fish.



Finally, her aunts decided upon a plan to trick Tekakwitha into marriage. According to Mohawk custom, a girl told her parents when she had made up her mind to marry a particular young man. Her parents then would tell the young man's family. A date was then set for the wedding ceremony. Meanwhile, the two lovers were not allowed to see each other until the young man, together with his parents, would come to the home of the girl. Then the girl would serve him a bowl of sagamité. This was a mush of cornmeal, cooked with pieces of meat and fish, all of it covered with a generous amount of hot bear grease. It was from this moment that they became husband and wife.

So here was the plan which Tekakwitha's parents had decided upon. Without saying a word to Tekakwitha, they went to the family of a young man and told him that Tekakwitha had decided to marry their son if he would agree to take her as his wife. The young man was surprised because Tekakwitha had hardly ever spoken to him. But, he thought to himself, she is the daughter of a leading chief. Besides, she is a quiet and hard working girl who surely would be a good wife to him. So he said that he would accept her proposal and a date was set for the marriage ceremony.

Tekakwitha still had no knowledge of these arrangements. But the young man, thinking that the proposal had really come from Tekakwitha, carefully prepared a few bundles of beaver skins as his present to the bride's parents.

About a week later, Tekakwitha's aunts told her to prepare a special meal for that very evening because an honored visitor would come with his family to visit them. They also told her to put on her best clothes and ornaments. Tekakwitha cheerfully obeyed. By evening she had the meal ready. Then she appeared with her best clothes on. She had adorned herself with a headband, feather and necklace. The beautiful designs of the many-colored beads on her dress and moccasins, which she had made herself, caused exclamations of admiration.

Shortly after sunset, the young man appeared with his parents and was received with great honor. He wore a headdress of brilliantly colored eagle feathers. Around his neck was a string of elk teeth. His face was painted with stripes of red and yellow. Tekakwitha greeted him with a friendly smile. But when her step-father offered him the seat of honor at the fireplace, Tekakwitha was surprised, for an Indian chief gives up his seat only on very rare and great occasions.

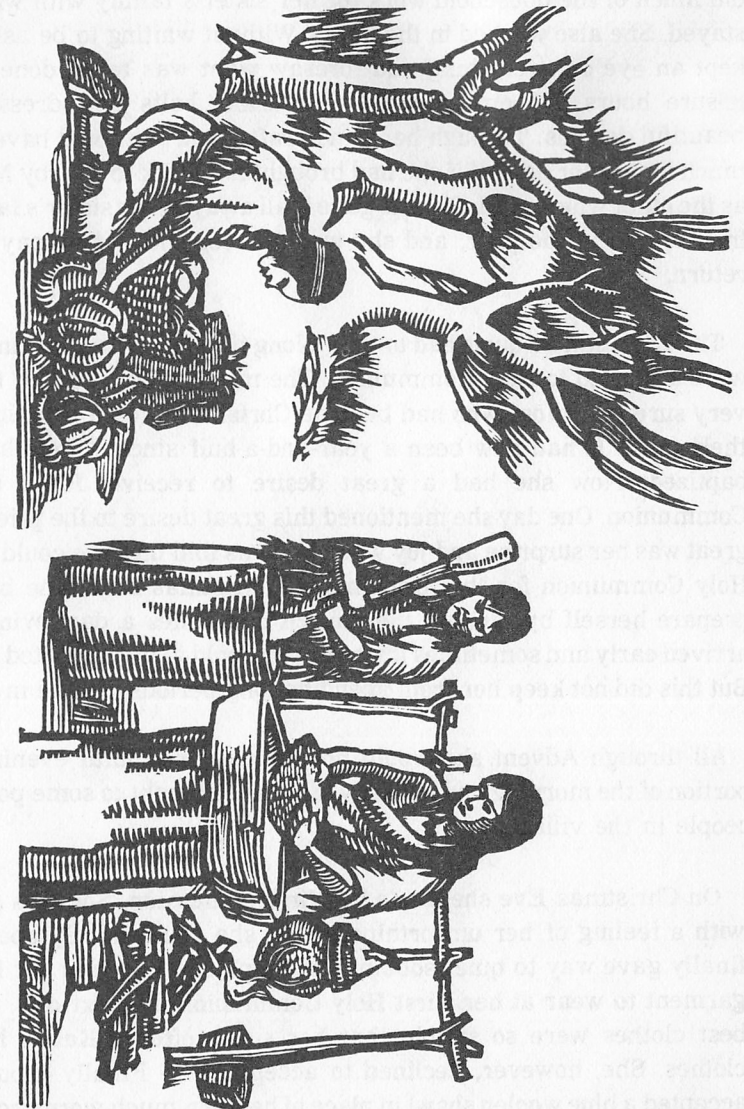
Meanwhile the other chiefs called a meeting of the Great Council. There Tekakwitha's step-father spoke angrily against "The Great Mohawk." He said: "You are a traitor to your own people, tearing apart our tribe, embracing the religion of the White Man and further weakening our nation which has already lost so many lives in recent battles."

"The Great Mohawk" then stood up to defend himself. He said: "Brothers, it is not my fault, but yours! Why do you hate us Christians and make life unbearable for us? We are Mohawks like you, and we love our tribe. If you would only stop your senseless vices, give up the evils of drunkenness, witchcraft and immorality, and live in peace with us, as true brothers should, there would be no need for us to leave our beautiful Mohawk valley. Even so, we shall gladly return as soon as you change your ways—but not a day earlier!" An embarrassed silence followed his words. The chiefs and elders found no response to these earnest, powerful words of their great leader.



Tekakwitha was seventeen and still without a boy friend. Other Indian girls had their boy friends at that age and were ready to marry when they were eighteen or nineteen. But, even though her aunts tried to urge her to go with boys, Tekakwitha refused. She was a normal, happy girl who knew that her people expected her to enter an early marriage. But still it was as though a voice deep within her heart kept telling her to keep herself free from the bonds of human love that led to marriage. And for her refusal to "fall in love," Tekakwitha had to endure the constant scolding of her aunts.

The Indians at the "Village of Prayer" considered it their duty to treat every visitor kindly. They generously shared their harvest with others.



Every morning Kateri attended Mass. Then at noon she attended the daily religious instruction for adults. In the evening she returned to the church for the singing of the Rosary.

Kateri had always been a hard worker. At the "Village of Prayer" she did much of the household work for her sister's family with whom she stayed. She also worked in the fields. Without waiting to be asked, she kept an eye on everything and foresaw what was to be done. In her leisure hours she embroidered moccasins, belts and dresses with beautiful designs. Through her handicraft alone she could have earned much money for herself if she had brought her work to nearby Montreal as the other women did. But she gave it all away to her sister's family, to friends and to the poor, and she would accept no gift or payment in return.

The Christian Iroquois had to wait a long time after Baptism until they were admitted to Holy Communion. The missionaries wanted to make very sure that those who had become Christians would remain true to their faith. It had now been a year-and-a-half since Kateri had been baptized. Now she had a great desire to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. One day she mentioned this great desire to the priest. How great was her surprise and joy when she was told that she could receive Holy Communion for the first time on Christmas Day! She began to prepare herself by visiting the church five times a day. Winter had arrived early and sometimes it was bitterly cold in the unheated church. But this did not keep her from spending long periods of time in prayer.

All through Advent she would not eat any food until evening. Her portion of the morning and noonday meal she brought to some poor, sick people in the village.

On Christmas Eve she made her first Confession. She was so filled with a feeling of her unworthiness that she could hardly speak, and finally gave way to quiet sobbing. At home she had laid out her best garment to wear at her First Holy Communion the next day. But her best clothes were so simple that her sister offered Kateri her own clothes. She, however, declined to accept them. Finally though, she accepted a blue woolen shawl in place of her own much-worn brown one.

"And what about some ornaments?" asked her sister, Enita. "For the feast of Christmas and your own First Communion you must adorn yourself with beautiful beaded and pearl jewelry."

In the fall of 1670 Father Boniface came to the village. He built a church there. Up until this time the only Catholics in the village were the Huron slaves and one old Mohawk widow, Anastasia, who has already been mentioned. But now Father Boniface began baptizing a group of Mohawk adults who had completed a long period of instructions under the previous missionary.

Among the newly-baptized was Enita, the step-sister of Tekakwitha, and her husband, Onas. Three years before, she had left the home of her father, the chief, and moved to another village. Soon after her departure, her father was informed that she was attending the religious instructions. This news made him so angry that he cut her off forever from the family. Now when word reached him that she and her husband were to be baptized, he threatened his family with punishment if they even mentioned her name in his presence.

All of these newly-baptized Mohawks were treated with constant ridicule among their people. Every accident, every misfortune, every case of sickness in the village was blamed on them.

In the summer of the following year, 1671, a wave of excitement went through the settlements of the Mohawks. One of their chiefs, whose Indian name meant "The Great Mohawk," returned from a long hunting trip in the north and announced that he had become a Catholic Christian. This was the same chief who had led them in victory over the Mohicans. He now told his people that in his wanderings through the forests he had come by chance upon the so-called "Village of Prayer," a settlement of Catholic Iroquois. The inhabitants there had recognized "The Great Mohawk" and had greeted him with joy. They invited him to stay among them as long as he wished. The peace and friendship there had greatly impressed the chief. Finally, after much thinking, he asked for Baptism. So after a few months of instruction "The Great Mohawk" was received into the Church. He then decided to return home, get his wife and return to the "Village of Prayer." He now wanted to spend the rest of her life as a religious teacher and helper to the priests there.

Besides, he was now offering to take all other Christians along who wanted to go north with him to the "Village of Prayer." About thirty Mohawks then declared that they would go with him. Among them were Anastasia, Enita and Onas.



One day Tekakwitha's step-mother said to her husband: "Tekakwitha is fourteen years old now. It is time that we start thinking of her future. Since she is the daughter of a chief, she should be able to find a suitable boy for marriage."

"You are right," the chief said. "She is clever with her hands and can think better than other girls. Here in our home she is a good worker and cooks all the meals. The man who is going to marry her will not regret his choice."

So now, two or three times a week, her aunts took her to the other homes where she could meet boys. But at dances it was noticed that Tekakwitha never invited other boys to dance with her. The only dance she joined in was the one in which boys and girls danced in separate groups. When her aunts told her to dance with the boys too, Tekakwitha refused, saying: "I am still too young to dance with men." Then her aunts would scold her on the way back home: "What a stubborn girl," her step-mother said. "She, the daughter of a chief, does not dare to speak to a young man!" Then her aunts would ridicule her Algonquin ancestry. "She is not a real Mohawk, but a timid Algonquin like her mother. She has no courage. We Mohawks are not good enough for her," they said.

These words hurt Tekakwitha. She started crying, saying: "Please don't scold me! I should like to obey you, but I am still too young to fall in love with a man."

Her step-father overheard this and turned to the women, saying: "The child is right. You women are too impatient. Leave her alone. When the right time comes, she will dance and fall in love. No use trying to force her before she is ready."



"I think it is better if I don't adorn myself," Kateri answered. "God does not look for external displays of decorations and ornaments." Her godmother, Anastasia, also urged her not to be stubborn, but to wear the finest ornaments they had in the house. But Kateri turned to her with a smile and said: "Mother, the love of Jesus does not need beautiful, fine things. He did not wear any adornments when He died on the cross for love of us." So Kateri received her First Holy Communion in a plain, unadorned garment, wearing only the Rosary beads around her neck.

Throughout the rest of Christmas Day she went about the village carrying provisions of food and Christmas presents, which she had made, to lonely and sick people. Then in the evening she returned to the church to spend another hour in prayer at the end of her great feast day.



Every year, shortly after Christmas, the Iroquois left their villages and went on what they called "the great hunt." It lasted about three months. They would travel in groups on foot into the forests and mountains far from home. When they reached the hunting ground they would build temporary homes of branches and mud. The Christian Indians at the "Village of Prayer" also followed this ancient custom.

But while these Christian Indians were on "the great hunt," all work stopped on Sundays except the necessary cooking. They would gather together for a prayer service and sing their Mass hymns. The priest did not join them on these winter hunts, but would remain in the village to take care of the sick and old. By Holy Week all groups returned to the village.

Kateri had gone on many of these hunts as a child. But when she began living at the "Village of Prayer" she would have liked to remain at home. And this for two reasons: first, she did not want to miss daily attendance at Mass; and second, she was anxious to spend her time caring for the sick while the others were away. But Anastasia and Enita both objected strongly to this idea of her remaining behind. Finally Kateri consulted the priest who suggested that she do what her family wished. Kateri then went cheerfully along with the rest.

While they were on the "great hunt," Kateri tried to be as helpful as she could. Every morning she was the first one up. She hurried down to the spring to get water. Then she helped cook the meal. Afterwards she went with the children into the forest to gather dead branches for firewood.

At noon, after the meal, all the other women and children laid down and went to sleep. But Kateri would leave the wigwam at this time and walk to the bank of the stream. There she found a perfect hide-away among the branches of some trees. The branches were so close together that no one could see her. With a knife she cut a cross into the bark of one of the trees. Then she knelt down in front of the holy sign and spent an hour in quiet prayer. During this time she seemed not to notice the bitter cold.

It was just these daily trips to her hide-away which later were to cause the darkest hours of her life. She was suspected of having an affair with a man there in the forest. Her most valuable treasure—her very purity—was questioned. Kateri suffered greatly, but in silence, throughout this terrible trial. She made no effort to find out who her accuser was. For the sake of the suffering Jesus, who Himself was also falsely accused during His lifetime, Kateri was willing to be regarded as a sinner. It was only some months later that her entire innocence in the matter was discovered. After Kateri's death, her accuser came forward and publicly accused herself of starting the unjust suspicion. Her feelings of guilt almost caused her to lose her mind and the priest had all he could do to restore her peace of soul.



Father Pierron protested against this torturing of prisoners, but the Mohawks paid no attention to him. However, they did allow him to tend to the tortured captives in their pain. Father Pierron would spend the whole night with them. One by one all of these Mohicans asked for Baptism. They wanted to die as Christians.

Tekakwitha, who was thirteen at the time, lived through all of this wild excitement. But during it all she remained at home. She could not endure the sight of these captive Mohawks being tortured. On the last day of the victory celebration, her step-mother begged her to come along and watch the killing. All of the other girls of the village would be there, she said. But Tekakwitha absolutely refused. She said to her two aunts: "If you let me stay at home I shall use my time to make a nice headband for each of you." So Tekakwitha's family finally gave up trying to urge her to go and left without her.

During the final torturing of the captives, the Mohican men would endure all wounds with great courage. They would never cry out. Women, however, were not expected to suffer silently. Their piercing cries would fill the whole village. And the more they screamed, the greater was the pleasure of the onlookers.

Tekakwitha, sitting at home making the beaded headbands, heard all of this. Her eyes filled with tears; and as she wiped them away, she shook her head with displeasure. "It is wrong," she whispered to herself. "God loves all human beings. He does not want us to find pleasure in torturing and killing our captive enemies."

But the Mohawks believed that in this way they were honoring their war god Areskoi. After this war with the Mohicans there followed a long period of peace. The missionaries had talked strongly against these frequent wars and the torturing of captives. Now the Mohawks, much weakened by these frequent wars, seemed ready to listen to the missionaries. They sent many of their children over to listen to the religious instruction of the priest. But still Tekakwitha was not allowed to go. She would just hear about the teaching from some of her friends who went there.



the Catholics praying and singing in the church. She greatly desired that someday she could learn more about God and His holy teaching.



One day during the summer of 1669 the Mohicans invaded the territory of the Mohawks and attacked at dawn the village of Gaa-naa-waa-gee. However, the Mohawk guards were on duty and quickly sounded the alarm. A fierce battle raged for three days. During the battle, Tekakwitha joined some other girls in helping Father Pierron to care for the wounded and bury the dead. When finally help came from the other Mohawk villages, the Mohicans turned and fled.

The next day the Mohawks decided to trail them. Finally they came upon their camp and attacked them. The battle lasted one full day. During this battle the Mohican chief was killed by a Mohawk chief. So that night the Mohicans turned and fled. Eighty of their number had been killed and seventeen taken prisoner.

The Mohawks then returned with their prisoners to their own villages. They then began a three-day celebration, with the sound of drums, dancing and the firing of rifles. Every afternoon they would torture the captive Mohicans, thirteen men and four women. Then in the evening they would have a big banquet, with speeches and dancing. On the third day the prisoners would be tortured to death.

While on the winter hunt and lacking the consolations of the mission, Kateri used to pray at her own shrine in the woods.





One day Anastasia expressed the hope that Kateri might get married soon. "She is already 21, past the age when most of the girls get married," she observed. The other women agreed. Enita and Onas had in fact often worried about Kateri's future. If Kateri insisted on remaining single, how would they be able to take care of her when they got old and feeble?

One day Enita mentioned this to Kateri and she answered: "My future should never cause you worry, dear sister. The handicrafts I make will be sufficient to provide me with what I will need. I feel sure that God will help me never to be a burden on you."

It always seemed that some inner voice kept leading Kateri away from the thought of marrying someday. But the other women simply could not understand her thinking on this matter. Anastasia said to Enita: "The girl is a puzzle I cannot figure out. She is otherwise so good and obedient in everything. Why, then, does she remain so stubborn when it comes to the question of marriage? Someday I'll have a talk with the priest and ask him to set her straight in her thinking, which is causing us much trouble and worry."

In view of all this pressure, Kateri now thought that she should go to the priest and talk to him about it. She told him of her own wish to remain a virgin in order to give herself completely to Christ. But the priest, in order to test her, spoke of all the reasons why she should enter marriage.

When the priest had finished talking, Kateri said to him: "Father, I am not my own. I have given myself entirely to Jesus. He must be my only love. The thought of not having anyone to care for me if I do not marry does not frighten me. All I need is a little food and a few pieces of clothing. More than that I don't want. With the work of my hands I shall always earn what is necessary. What I don't need I will give to my relatives and to the poor. If I should become sick and unable to work then I shall be like the Lord on the cross. He will have mercy on me and help me, I am sure." Kateri paused for a while and then added: "Were you afraid of poverty, Father, when you left everything and became a priest to work for us poor Indians?"

Kateri had won her argument. The priest could only say: "Think prayerfully about your decision, Kateri. If the Lord is really calling you to a life of virginity for His sake then I shall not hinder you in anyway. I shall also pray about it and after a few weeks we shall discuss your final

After the peace treaty between the French and the Iroquois Nation in 1667, Catholic missionaries established missions among the Mohawks. Kateri first saw a priest at that time.



The Iroquois Nation had carried on a series of raids against the Huron Indians. Whole villages of these Hurons had become Catholic. Perhaps this was the reason for the bad feeling between them and the Iroquois. Then finally, in a terrible war, the Iroquois destroyed the Huron Nation. They also tortured and cruelly killed any priest whom they happened to capture. But finally, four of the tribes which made up the Iroquois Nation gradually became peaceful. Only the Mohawks kept raiding Catholic Indian villages up in what is now Canada. Finally the French struck back, attacked the Mohawks and burned their villages and crops.

The Mohawks then signed a peace treaty. After awhile they even asked for missionaries to come and live amongst them. So in 1667, three priests were sent to visit the villages of the Mohawks. The first village they came to was the village where Tekakwitha lived. She was eleven years old at the time. As she saw them for the first time she remembered what Anastasia had told her about them—that her own mother had greatly respected these good and holy men, that she had received the Faith from them, and that she had said the prayers which they had taught her.

That night Tekakwitha thought of the words which Father Bruyas had spoken after her step-father had grudgingly welcomed them to the village. He had said that “the true God is the father of all men, the red as well as the white. He loves all human beings; and everyone may speak to Him, for He hears every whisper and sees what is in every heart.” Then Tekakwitha looked up to the sky and said: “O God, help me to know You and love You.”

After a short time the three priests separated—two of them going on to the other villages. Only Father Pierron remained at the village of Gaa-naa-waa-gee. He offered Mass for the Catholic Huron slaves there, baptized dying children, visited the people and cared for the sick, and tried to interest the people in the holy teachings of Jesus. Finally, after two years, he had formed a small group of Christians among the Mohawks.

But Tekakwitha's step-father was never friendly with the priest and was against the Catholic religion. He forbade his family to speak to the priest or to attend his instructions. So Tekakwitha only saw the priest as he passed by their house and smiled at her. Sometimes she could hear

decision.”

Kateri then left and went into the church to pray, but in ten minutes was back knocking at the priest's door. “I do not need any more time, Father. This has been the desire of my whole life!”



But Enita and Anastasia both continued to urge Kateri very strongly to enter marriage, not knowing that she had already talked it over with the priest. So when Kateri still refused, Anastasia decided to take the matter in her own hands and go see the priest herself. The priest calmly heard everything Anastasia had to say. Then he said to her: “I am surprised that you, a good Christian of many years, should be trying to oppose this girl who wishes to give up marriage for love of Christ. Let this now be the end of this matter! God is calling her to another kind of life which is very holy.”

After that Enita and Anastasia realized their mistake and were sorry for the way they had acted towards Kateri.

The date was set for March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, for Kateri to pronounce her religious vow of virginity in church. This was the day on which the angel had appeared to the Blessed Virgin Mary, asking her if she would become the mother of the Savior. On that day Kateri would be able to say the same words that Mary had used in reply to the angel: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.”



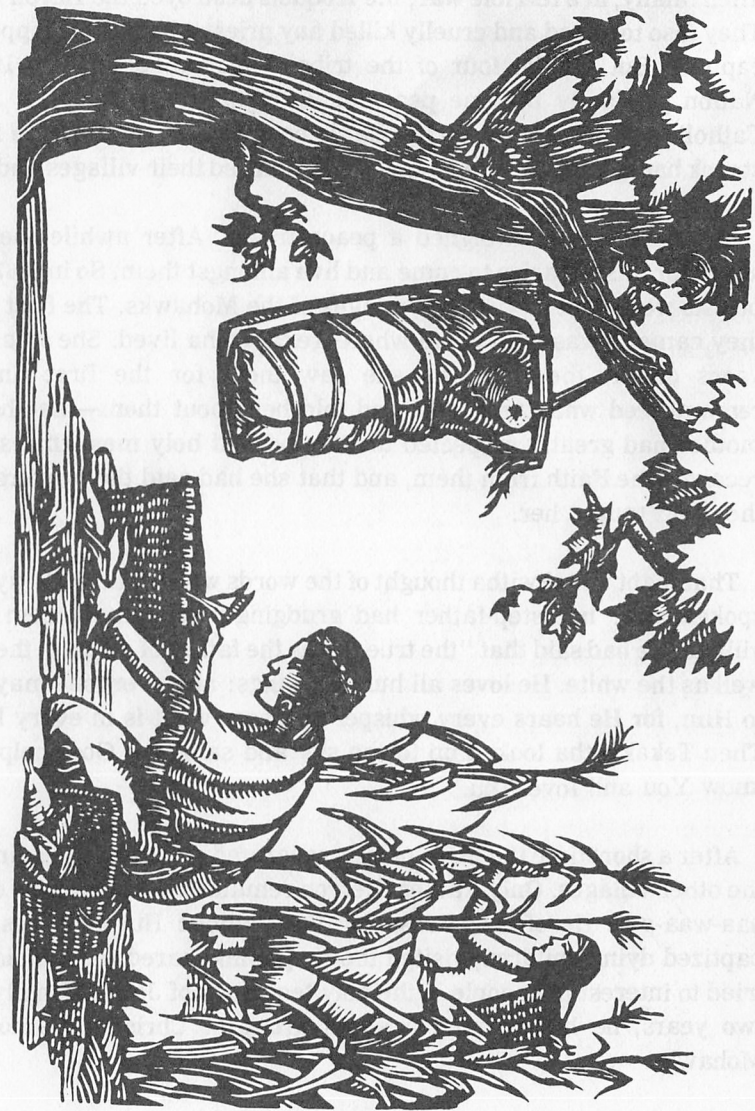
January came and the people began to prepare for the great winter hunt again. Kateri intended to stay at home this time, but again her relatives kept urging her to come along. Even the priest tried to talk her into going. He thought that her health, which appeared to have been failing a bit of late, would benefit from the fresh meat which was always provided for those who went. But Kateri answered him: "It is true, Father, that there is better air and more food in the camp; however, the soul suffers much hunger out there in the wilderness. Here in the village I shall have only some corn or fish for the body, but my soul will be nourished with Holy Communion; and I shall be able to visit the Blessed Sacrament every day in church. However, if you order me to go I shall obey; but if you allow me to choose, I would rather stay here and prepare myself for the religious vow I shall be making." The priest then permitted Kateri to remain behind in the village.

Kateri began each day by going to the church to attend Mass. Then she would be seen walking through the village with a heavy basket, caring for the sick and the old. She would tend their fires, get fresh water for them from the spring and give them food. During the afternoon she would return to the church and spend hours in prayer.

After the middle of March the hunters and their families returned to the village from the great hunt. Soon after their return, on the Feast of the Annunciation, Kateri privately pronounced her vow of perpetual virginity in church, shortly after receiving her Lord in Holy Communion. Thereafter she lived like a religious Sister. However, she wore no special dress to distinguish her from others. She wore only a plain type of clothing, avoiding ornaments and colored ribbons which the other young ladies wore. It became a common saying in the village that Kateri could be seen only on her way to church, in the homes of the sick or in the fields. She avoided taking part in amusements or social events.



Kateri Tekawitha was born to the Mohawk chief and his Christian Algonquin wife in 1656.





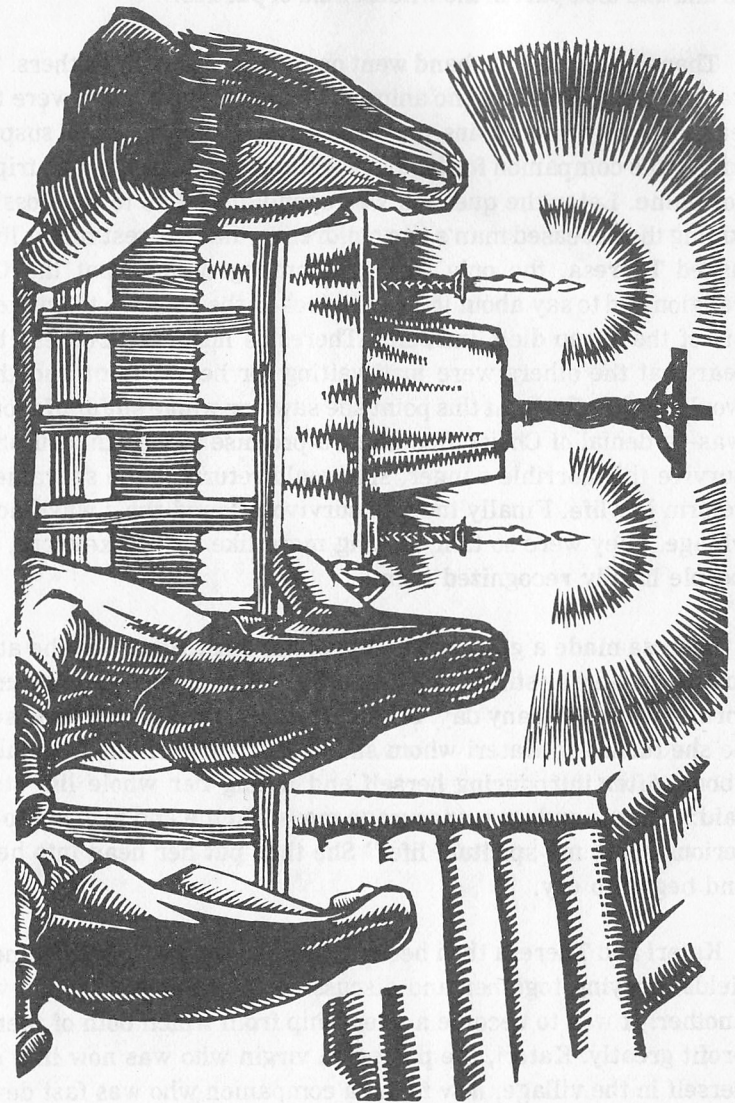
Two years after "Little Sunshine" was born, Kahontáakee gave birth to a baby boy. But then, two more years later, the dreaded small-pox epidemic entered the village. Day after day, throughout the whole winter, the dead were carried out to the edge of the forest to be buried. Finally the terrible disease entered the house of the chief. The whole family became violently sick. First the chief died, then two days later his wife followed him. As she lay dying, her friend, Anastasia, knelt beside her and whispered the Catholic prayers into her ear. Just before Kahontáakee died, she lifted her head and said the words: "Jesus, have mercy on me!" Her baby boy also died the same day. Now "Little Sunshine" was the only one left. She hovered between life and death for six more days. Then finally the fever left her. But the disease left pockmarks on her beautiful face which she would have for the rest of her life. Also the disease left her eyes very weak.

Now the dead chief's sister, Karitha, adopted the girl. Karitha's husband was then chosen as chief to succeed his brother-in-law. "Little Sunshine," now half-blind, could not run and play with the other children. So she spent her time helping her step-mother at home. As she grew older, she would sew, carry water, cook and help with the hoeing of the garden.

When "Little Sunshine" would walk she couldn't see objects until she was very close to them. To avoid bumping into them she would have to stretch both hands out in front of her and walk with short steps. It was this characteristic which led to the child receiving the name "Tekakwitha" from her step-father when she was eight years old. The name meant "She pushes with her hands." Among the Mohawks it also had a special meaning. It meant a woman who works hard and keeps everything in order.



In the church Kateri spent many hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.





Kateri's closest friend was an Oneida named Theresa, who was five years older than she. Theresa had been raised a Christian, but then she married a non-Christian man. He and his relatives took cruel pleasure in tearing her away from her Catholic religion. Soon she became a drunk and took part in the wildest kind of parties.

Then she and her husband went on the hunt with nine others. The food ran out. They could find no animals to hunt. Finally, they were forced to eat their own moccasins and tree bark. One was even suspected of killing his companion for his flesh while they were on a side trip looking for game. Later the question was openly posed as to the possibility of killing the deceased man's two children so that the rest might live. They asked Theresa, the only Christian among them, what the Christian religion had to say about it, but she lacked the courage to answer. Later six of the group died, including Theresa's husband. Theresa began to fear that the others were just waiting for her to faint and then they would eat her flesh. At this point she saw her whole sinful life for what it was—a denial of Christ. She made a promise to God that, if she would survive this horrible danger, she would return to the sacraments and reform her life. Finally the five survivors found their way back to the village. They were so thin, looking more like living skeletons, that the people hardly recognized them.

Theresa made a good confession of her sins. However, the attraction to a life of sin was still strong in her. She felt that she would return to her former way of life any day. She desperately needed help from someone. So she turned to Kateri whom she had never met but had only heard about. After introducing herself and telling her whole life story, she said: "Please gude me, encourage me, scold me and help me to become serious about my spiritual life." She then put her head into her hands and began to cry.

Kateri and Theresa then became like sisters, working together in the fields, praying together and discussing their spiritual plans with one another. It was to become a friendship from which both of them would profit greatly. Kateri, the professed virgin who was now in a class by herself in the village, now found a companion who was fast developing the same spiritual outlook. Besides, the personality traits of the one happily complimented those of the other. It is Theresa to whom we are indebted for much of the information we now have of Kateri's life.

Kahontáakee had only one worry—how to get her child baptized and how to raise her as a Catholic. Her husband, "Great Beaver," knew that his wife was a Christian. He did not object when every evening she knelt for a short while in the corner of the room and said her prayers in silence. But he would not allow her to speak of her Faith. This made life hard for Kahontáakee. But she did have one close friend, an older Mohawk woman, who was a Christian also. This older woman, Anastasia by name, had married into the Catholic Onondaga tribe and had received the Faith from her husband. When he died, she returned to her Mohawk village. Kahontáakee found in her friendship the spiritual help she needed.

So Kahontáakee asked her: "Tell me, Anastasia, how can we get my baby baptized?" Anastasia thought for awhile and then answered: "For the present nothing can be done. We shall have to be patient and pray. You must not arouse the suspicions and anger of your husband who is our chief now. The Onondaga Tribe allowed a priest to come and build a church in their village. Who knows, some day the Mohawks might give the same permission. Then you would have a priest right here to help and advise you."

Kahontáakee shook her head sadly: "I don't have much hope that a priest will ever come here—except as a prisoner to be tortured and killed." Anastasia then put her arms on her friend's shoulder and said: "Have courage, my daughter! Leave everything in God's hands! Meanwhile, may God watch over you and your child!"

But one day a priest did come to the village. He came with the permission of the Great Council of the Iroquois Nation, of which the Mohawk Tribe was a member. The reason for his visit was to give the sacraments to the Huron captives. These were Catholics who were captured during an Indian war. They had not seen a priest in seven or eight years. So although the Mohawks were not friendly toward the priest, still they allowed him to come into their village and remain for two weeks with the Huron captives.

During his stay, Anastasia came secretly one evening to see the priest. She told him of how Kahontáakee desired to have her baby baptized. But the priest advised her to wait until the Mohawks would allow missionaries to come freely into their villages.



The Mohawk brave decided to take the captured Algonquin slave for his wife.

The Iroquois had been trained from childhood to endure extreme pain voluntarily. In this way they would be able to suffer in silence the horrible tortures inflicted by enemies. So it was that when they became Christians, they continued to inflict punishment on their bodies, but now the purpose was to make up for their past sins and the sins of others. Thus it was that some men and women wore hair shirts next to their skin, kept strict fasts and exposed themselves to bitter cold. The priests, for the most part, did not know of this because the Christians never thought of asking their advice about it. After all, they thought, didn't many saints, whose lives the priests read to them, do things like this too?

So we read of Kateri and Theresa sometimes reciting the Rosary while walking barefoot up and down the icy river in the freezing cold of winter, clad only in light garments. When summer came they sometimes whipped each other with branches of thorns in some hidden place in the forest until their shoulders were covered with blood. Later when the priest heard about this he forbade them to do it again.



During the winter of the following year, Kateri suffered repeated attacks of fever and had to spend most of her time in bed. More and more her thoughts turned to death. She was not afraid of dying; on the contrary, she rejoiced at the thought of soon being with the Lord. It was the time of the great winter hunt again and so Kateri's relatives were all away. Kateri was cared for by an elderly woman who brought her food and water. But as soon as the fever left her, Kateri began caring for the sick and old people again.

In the month of March, after the hunters and their families had again returned from the great hunt, Kateri was again back in bed with fever and pain. Her condition gradually worsened so that, from Palm Sunday on, a woman had to stay at her bedside all through the night. On Monday of Holy Week, Kateri asked to do without her morning meal. She wanted to give it up in honor of the Lord's Passion, she said. But the old woman who was caring for her said: "Never mind, Kateri. It's too late now for fasting and penance; you are approaching the end." At these words, Kateri's face beamed with joy.

On Tuesday Kateri received Holy Communion. For this occasion she was clothed in a nice dress which Theresa had brought her. Kateri herself had given away all of her own dresses, keeping only an old garment for herself, since she knew that she would soon die.

That night her dear friend Theresa stayed all night at her bedside. Kateri whispered to her: "I have to leave you, Theresa. Thank you for all your love and help. Remain loyal to Jesus; always follow the advice of the priests. Avoid people who do not practice the Faith. I shall pray for you and assist you from heaven. Farewell!" Kateri, having said this, closed her eyes in sheer exhaustion, while Theresa, crying bitterly, stroked her hand.

On Wednesday of Holy Week the priest gave Kateri the Sacrament of Anointing. Afterwards Kateri kissed the crucifix and whispered: "Jesus, I love you." She then became unconscious. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, while two priests and Theresa knelt at her bedside praying, and surrounded by relatives and friends, Kateri breathed her last. It was April 17, 1680. Kateri was 24 years of age.



Kateri Tekakwitha (pronounced Te-gah-gwét-ha) could possibly be declared a Saint someday by the Catholic Church. At present she has been given the title "Venerable Servant of God," which means that she lived a life of great holiness. She was born more than three hundred years ago in what is now upper-state New York.

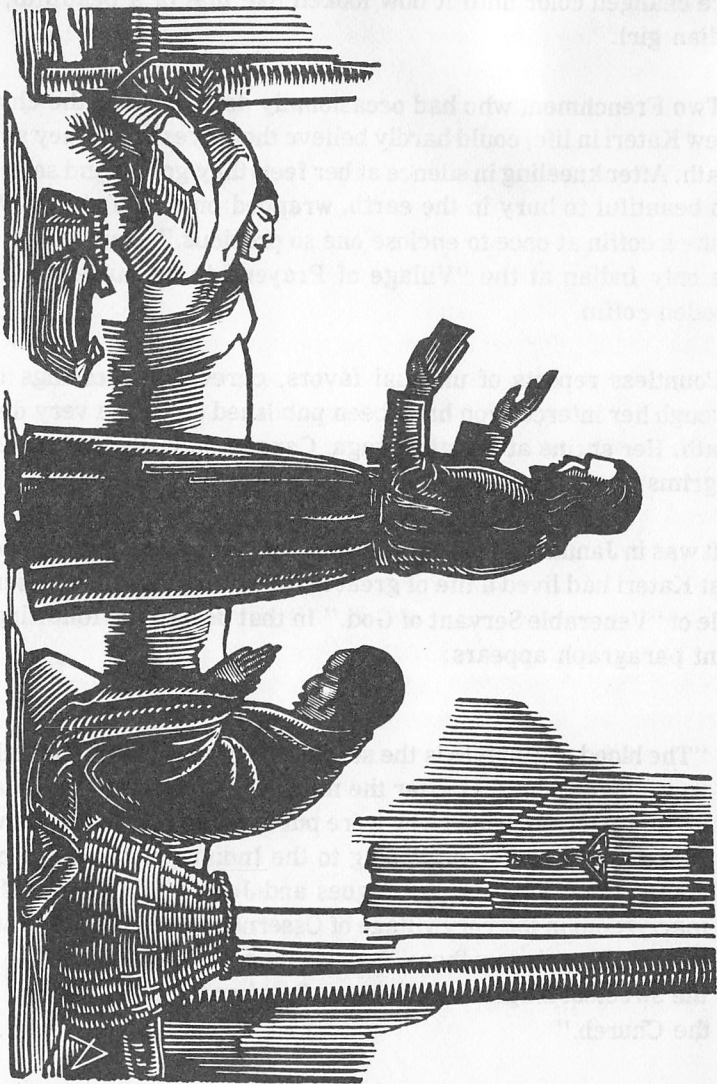
Kateri's father was a pagan Mohawk, while her mother was a Catholic Algonquin who was born near Quebec, Canada. The mother's name in the Mohawk language was Ka-hon-táa-kee which means "meadow." Kahontáakee's parents, both Catholics, died when their child was still small. The child was then adopted by a French family. They had her baptized and carefully educated her in Catholic beliefs and customs.

But when the child was twelve years old, a band of Mohawks attacked the village. They spared the life of the girl because she was Indian. She then became the slave of the young brave who had captured her. For eight years she worked hard among this tribe which was so much different from her own. Her own Algonquin people were meek and peace-loving, but the Mohawks were fierce and war-like

The young Mohawk brave who had captured her was called "Great Beaver." One day he decided to make Kahontáakee his wife. She then became a free woman. A short time later, the Mohawk council chose "Great Beaver" as one of their chiefs.

Their first child was a girl. It was a Mohawk custom not to give a child its final name until it was seven or eight years old. So until then they just called the child "Little Sunshine" because she was born at sunrise in April of the year 1656. Only later would this child receive the name Tekakwitha.





After but four years as a fervent Christian, Kateri died peacefully in the Lord on April 17, 1680, in her twenty-fourth year.

Tejapwina Indian Mission  
 Buck, Arizona, May 7, 1975

This short life of Kateri Tekakwitha actually grew out of a long series of 30 radio programs on her life which was broadcast over "The Peace" from a weekly program in the Navajo Indian language. It was then decided to publish the script in order to promote further the cause of this holy Iroquois maiden among the Navajo people.

In writing this script I depended greatly on the book "Kateri Tekakwitha" by Fr. Francis Xavier Weiser, S. J. Much of the material enclosed herein might even be considered a condensed version of Fr. Weiser's excellent book, though in simpler English. This was done with full cooperation of Fr. Weiser's publisher, Fr. Henry Richard, S. J., Vice-President for the Cause of Tekakwitha, who holds the book's copyright but refrains from other uses was secured.

The art work was done by Father M. Aguilera and originally appeared in the book "Kateri Tekakwitha" as being a reproduction in English of the original documents of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. This art work is here reprinted by permission of the publisher from "Kateri Tekakwitha" (ed. Robert E. Holland, S. J., New York: Fordham University Press, 1940, copyright 1940 by Fordham University Press.

It is my sincere hope that as a result of this little work Kateri Tekakwitha, the "Lily of the Mohawks," may become better known among her Indian brethren and sisters of the Southwest.

Fr. Carmelo Antonio, O. F. M.



Immediately after her death, a strange event occurred. The priests and all present witnessed it. Her face changed completely within the space of a few minutes. The lines of bitter suffering and sickness disappeared. Even the pockmarks, which had covered her face since childhood as a result of smallpox, could no longer be seen. Her smiling face changed color until it now looked like that of a beautiful, healthy Indian girl.

Two Frenchmen, who had occasionally done work in the church and knew Kateri in life, could hardly believe their eyes when they saw her in death. After kneeling in silence at her feet, they got up and said: "She is too beautiful to bury in the earth, wrapped only in a shawl. We must make a coffin at once to enclose one so precious." Thus Kateri became the only Indian at the "Village of Prayer" to be buried in a special wooden coffin.

Countless reports of unusual favors, cures and blessings obtained through her intercession have been published since the very day of her death. Her shrine at Caughnawaga, Canada, is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year.

It was in January of 1943 that Pope Pius XII issued a decree declaring that Kateri had lived a life of great holiness and therefore deserved the title of "Venerable Servant of God." In that decree the following significant paragraph appears:

"The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians," said Tertullian; no wonder, then, that after the martyrdom of eight missionaries of the Society of Jesus, who were put to death for Christ, between 1642 and 1649, after preaching to the Indians of those regions—among them Saints Isaac Jogues and John de Lalande suffered martyrdom in the very village of Ossernenon—no wonder a white lily should spring up there, flourish marvelously and suffuse with the sweetest fragrance of virtue, first her tribespeople and then the Church."

## FOREWORD

This short life of Kateri Tekakwitha actually grew out of a long series of 20 radio programs on her life which was broadcast over "The Padres' Hour," a weekly program in the Navajo Indian language. It was then decided to publish the scripts in order to promote further the cause of this holy Mohawk maiden among the Navajo people.

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Fr. Cormac Antram, O. F. M.

Tegakwitha Indian Mission  
Houck, Arizona, May 7, 1975





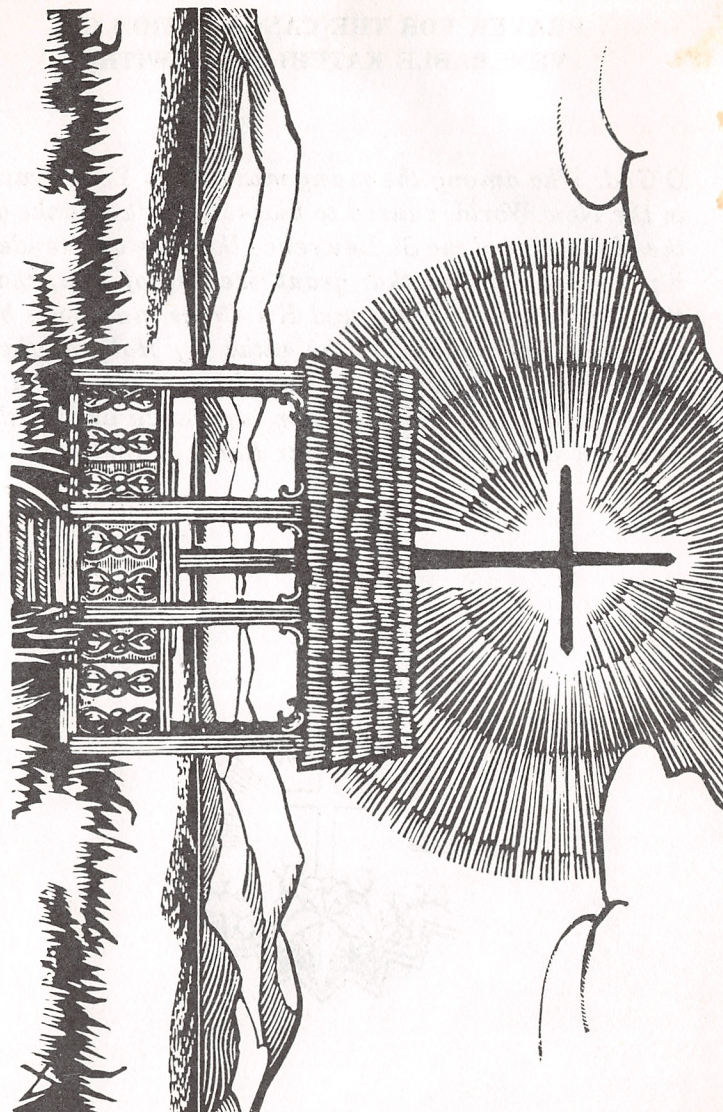
NIHIL OBSTAT: John J. McCarthy, Censor Deputatus

IMPRIMATUR: + Jerome J. Hastrich  
Episcopus Gallupiensis  
Die 14 Maii, 1975



In conformity with the decrees of Pope Urban VIII and other Sovereign Pontiffs, the writer declares that the graces and other supernatural facts related in this volume, as witnessing to the sanctity of this Servant of God, rest on human authority alone; the writer submits without reserve to the infallible judgment of the Apostolic See, whatever has been written concerning extraordinary graces vouchsafed to the subject of this work.

Her body is now entombed inside St. Francis Xavier Church,  
Caughnawaga, Canada. But in 1880 a monument was erected  
over the original grave in the old Indian cemetery.





**PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF  
VENERABLE KATERI TEKAKWITHA**

*O God, Who among the many marvels of Your grace in the New World, caused to blossom on the banks of the Mohawk and the St. Lawrence the pure and tender lily, Kateri Tekakwitha, grant, we beg of You, that this little lover of Jesus and His Cross may soon be raised to the honors of the altar by Holy Mother Church, and that our hearts may be enkindled with a stronger desire to imitate her innocence and faith. Through the same Christ, Our Lord. Amen.*



# THIS IS KATERI

by Fr. Cormac Antram, O. F. M.

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