

MOHAWK GLORY

Kateri Tekakwitha

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By

Sister Mary Grace, S.S.M.N.



ST. PAUL EDITIONS

NIHIL OBSTAT:

Rev. Richard V. Lawlor, S.J.
Censor Deputatus

IMPRIMATUR:

+Humberto Cardinal Medeiros
Archbishop of Boston

ISBN 0-8198-4700-3 (plastic)

ISBN 0-8198-4701-1 (paper)

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Printed in the U.S.A. by the Daughters of St. Paul
50 St. Paul's Ave., Boston, MA 02130

The Daughters of St. Paul are an international congregation of religious women serving the Church with the communications media.

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To Mary Immaculate "Mother of the Americas"

Listen! Indian lovers, please.
Etched, as on the bark of trees
is the simple, moving story
of a maiden, "Mohawk Glory."

Indian was the name given to these earliest inhabitants of the Americas by the white men who came here in the fifteenth century. They thought they had reached the East Indies.



Dear readers, from an imaginary plane flying over the continents of the Americas many years ago, let us view **The Great Parade** moving over our land, beginning thousands of years before Columbus discovered it in 1492. These two continents have a very long history of Indian life and development. Our present knowledge of these comes from the great work done by anthropologists (people who study the races of men) and archaeologists (those who dig for traces of ancient times and people).

Indians was the name given to these earliest inhabitants of the Americas by the white men who came here in the fifteenth century. They thought they had reached the East Indies,

but in truth, they had discovered a new world. Today Indians prefer to be called "native Americans."

Our imagination is fired by the wonderful story of these native Americans—how poor, simple people faced the challenge of the unknown—men, women and children, walking, walking, walking through ice and snow, at times in burning sun or pelting rain. And remember, at that time America was the icy top of the world!

Scientists have proven beyond a doubt that people have lived on this continent for thousands of years, yet their ancestors were from Asia and Europe. Over the Bering Strait they rippled in small groups down and across the land, even to the tip of South America. How do we know all this? By records in the earth. Hills, valleys, rivers, rocks, bones of men and animals tell the story that archaeologists have found and interpreted for us.

These earliest arrivals were copper-skinned, had straight black hair and black slanting eyes. These characteristics identified them as Mongolians, originating in Central Asia.

Eskimos—The oldest Indian culture was that of the Eskimos who remained in the cold Arctic region near the Bering Strait. These peo-

ple met the challenge of ice and snow, fog and winter-long darkness by remarkable inventions, such as well-tailored and waterproof fur suits; snow-houses (igloos); blubber-burning lamps (the first lamps of America!); the dog sled; the skin-covered kayak (hunting boat). But they were locked in their own world, and did not develop a civilization, and so they have remained unchanged for hundreds of years. A loving, jolly, contented people, their life might seem colorless, but blue skies, rose and golden dawns, and sunsets bring brightness into their daily routine. They speak a language different from any other language on earth.

All these moving people gradually formed into families, clans and tribes. The **Mayas** were the first to settle down in the Mexico area; later they moved on to Central America. Mayan hieroglyphics (stone pictures) tell their history. While in Central America the Mayas attained the highest civilization in ancient America.

In 1325 A.D. the **Aztecs** built a city where Mexico City now stands. They had a wonderful system of government. Their last war chief, Montezuma, was a powerful ruler.

The trail of bones and artifacts (as the weapons and stones are called) leads from North America, through the Isthmus of Panama, into South America. These people bravely crossed

the high bare crags of the Andes Mountains, or threaded their way through the swamps of the Amazon Valley.

In South America the **Incas** dominated, especially in Peru. They left no written records, but they did leave "pictographs"—pictures in stone and other materials—of their life and activities, even death and burial. Inca potters did most beautiful work; they molded jars in the forms of human faces.

In North America, in what is now the United States, between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, the **Great Plains** Indians boldly hunted the shaggy buffalo. After acquiring the European horse, their hunting was transformed. They became the most skillful and daring horsemen in the world. Other tribes in this vast area of the midwest were the **Blackfoot**, (Montana), **Shoshone** and **Ute** (Utah), **Crow**, **Sioux**, **Pawnee**, **Cheyenne** and **Omaha**.

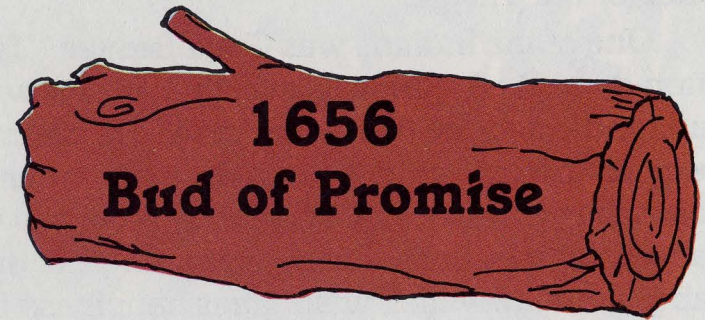
The Spanish explorer, Coronado, and his men were the first Europeans to see the limitless lands called the Great Plains, and the Indians who lived there. When they crossed these plains in 1541, riding on their 200 horses, they terrified the poor Indians they met along the route. The Indians thought that man and horse were "one piece." But the buffalo

were as strange to the Spanish as the horses were to the Indians.

At the time of the early explorers and trappers, there were three major routes west from the muddy little town of St. Louis: the Santa Fe Trail led into what is now New Mexico; the Missouri River Trail went north and west up the Missouri; and the Oregon Trail followed the Platte River through Nebraska and Wyoming to Oregon's Columbia River valley.

In these very early times, many tribes speaking different languages, also roamed the forests of Eastern America. The **Iroquois** were a large group living in and around what is now New York State and the Great Lakes, and the **Algonquin** lived beyond this area, throughout New England, some in the Great Lakes area, and others down the Atlantic coast.

We have here but a bird's-eye view of America's early times and people. The land of the Iroquois is the seed-bed for the story that now follows, the story of a little Indian maiden, a rose of love and penance and the glorious **Lily of the Mohawks**.



The Mohawks were a strong, warlike race, great warriors indeed. They were the fiercest and the most fearless of the Iroquois tribes that had settled in the woodland regions around Lake Erie and Lake Ontario and the Finger Lakes.

There was a little Indian village in the Mohawk Valley, a few miles west of Schenectady and Amsterdam, which is now called "Auriesville," but its earlier Indian name was "Ossernenon." Here begins our story.

It was a sunny day in April, 1656. The birds winging their way from the south were rousing the village with their songful greetings. The Mohawk River flowed lazily along the edge of the village as two Indians sped across

the water in their light canoe, one paddling, the other steering, until they came to the landing place of the village.

One of the Indians was Great Beaver ("Tsaniton-gowa"). As the eagle feather in his war-band indicated, he was a war chief. He seemed deep in thought and looked worried, when a voice startled him, "Chief, rejoice! You have a baby daughter, born this morning. Mother and baby are both well. I wish great happiness for you!"

"Thank you!" ("Nyawen" in his native language.) He hurried to his longhouse, his heart pounding with joy. His lovely young wife, Kahontake, or Kahenta, meaning "Meadow," smiled a welcome, and patted the little head that lay beside her. The chief stroked the silky hair of his little daughter. "What shall we call her?" It was a custom of the Iroquois to give their children a baby name after birth, until the child was about seven or eight, when the final name was given.

Kahontake spoke, "Our daughter was born at sunrise. Suppose we call her 'Sunshine' (Iora-gode)? The father smiled and agreed, and little Sunshine began her family life, a Mohawk Indian babe.

Her mother was a Christian Algonquin who was raised among the French at Three



Kahenta became the wife of the Mohawk
Chief Great Beaver.

Rivers. Later she was taken captive by the Iroquois. She became the wife of the Chief Great Beaver, who had fallen in love with the shy, attractive girl. Of course, as soon as she was married, she became again a free woman.

The chief knew that she was a Christian, but she was unobtrusive and quiet in the practice of her Faith, so he did not interfere. He and all the Iroquois, especially the Mohawks, were very hostile to the French and their "Black-robes," as they called the Jesuit priests that worked among them.

A close friend of Kahontake, another Christian, was Anastasia. She came to congratulate the happy mother and baby.

"Oh, Anastasia," said Kahontake, "how can we get our little one baptized? Could we secretly bring her to the priest at Onondaga?"

"We'd better wait," counseled Anastasia, "until a priest comes here to our village. Have courage, daughter, and trust in God. He will open up a way."

Little Sunshine became a ray of joy to all her family and friends. When she was about two, a little baby brother came, and it was Sunshine who gave him his baby name. "Sweet!" she said, and "Sugar" ("Otsiketa") he was called.

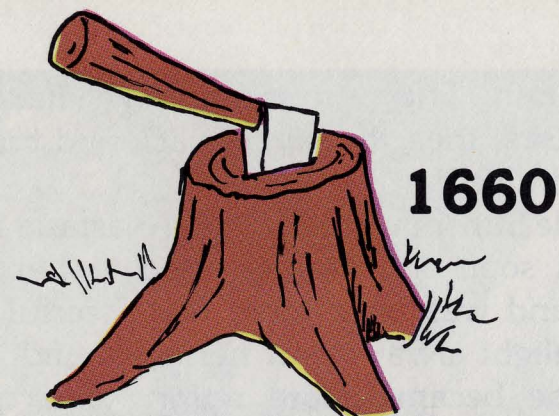


Little Sunshine became a ray of joy to all her family and friends.





In 1660, a smallpox epidemic swept the village, touching the little family also.



Blight of Loss

In 1660 a smallpox epidemic swept the village, touching this little family. Father, mother, baby brother—all died in a short time. Little Sunshine, just four, was left with marks of the disease over her face, and her eyes greatly weakened; she was almost blind.

Anastasia took care of her until her uncle, Lowerano ("Cold Wind"), his wife and sister, moved into the longhouse and adopted the little one as their own, according to the custom of the tribe. Lowerano was selected Chief in place of his brother-in-law. Like all his tribe he hated the Christians, especially the Blackrobe missionaries.

Another custom of the Iroquois was to change their abode after pestilence or other calamity. So, after six months, the Mohawks moved all their belongings up the hill, west of

Ossernenon. They erected a new cluster of longhouses; then they went back and burned their old dwellings.

Little Sunshine had "aunt" Anastasia nearby, and soon she became used to her new family and was once more her cheerful self. The sunlight always hurt her eyes, and gradually she became more retiring and quiet, although she was always friendly and helpful toward others.

One day her adopted father, Chief Lowerano, returning from a successful hunt, sat smoking his pipe when Sunshine, feeling her way along, came to welcome him home. As he observed her groping with hands extended he said to his wife, Karitha, "Look! te ka kwitha" (meaning "she pushes with her hands").

Karitha and her sister looked, then laughed aloud, and Karitha cried out, "Tekakwitha! A good name for her!" (Among the Indians it meant an ideal woman, one who works hard, keeps everything in order, prudent and loving.)

"Tekakwitha," murmured Lowerano, as he smoked his pipe. So from the time she was eight that was her name, and "Sunshine" was dropped. Gradually her eyes strengthened, and she didn't have to put out her hands as she moved along.



Little Sunshine's uncle, Lowerano, adopted her as his own daughter.

Little girls and boys had jobs to do during their childhood. They soon became accustomed to their tasks, and never dreamed of disobeying or shirking them. The mother was in charge of everything concerning the family, while the father taught the boys to hunt, to travel and to fight.

Young Tekakwitha collected wood in the forest, brought water from the spring and prepared the cornmeal for dinner. She learned to cook simple things, to prepare maple syrup, to gather berries and mushrooms. Later she learned to do beautiful art work, carving wood and beading moccasins, belts and headbands.

The restless and belligerent Mohawks made frequent raids upon their neighbors, the Christian Hurons and Algonquins who were friendly with the French in Canada. Ten years before, these Mohawks had tortured and killed three Jesuit missionaries at Ossernenon: Rene Goupil in 1642, then in 1646 Isaac Jogues and the lay missionary, John Lalande. The great coliseum of martyrs built at Auriesville is a memorial of these martyrs.

In 1648 the Mohawks nearly wiped out the Huron tribe in nearby Canada. After this war the Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas and Senecas (these four Indian nations, with the Mohawks, made up the Iroquois Confederacy)

sought for peace and sent a plea to open up small mission houses for the Christian Huron captives in their midst.

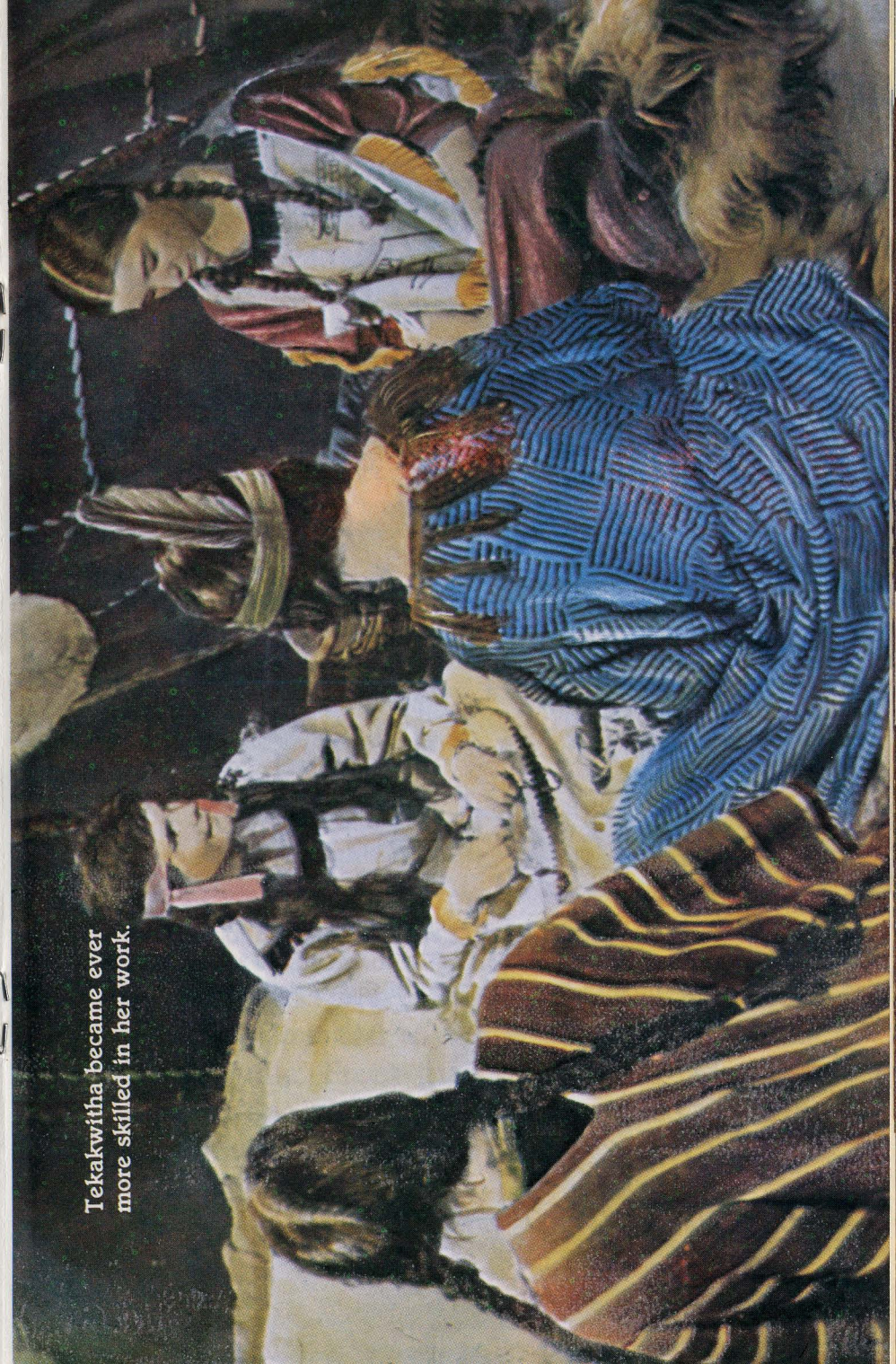
Still the Mohawk raids continued, so the French in Canada mustered troops and came down upon the Mohawks. In 1666 an army of 1,200 under the Marquis de Tracy attacked the village. They didn't slaughter the Indians; no one was injured. But the soldiers burned the Mohawks' homes, destroyed their supplies and ruined their plantations.

When the Canadian army withdrew the Mohawks crept back from the forests to the place where their homes had been. The Turtle Clan rebuilt on a new site across the Mohawk, upriver a few miles, near what is now Fonda, New York.

1667 Sturdy Growth

In 1667 the Five Nations were at peace; then the Mohawks sent ambassadors to Canada, asking for missionaries for their villages. In July three Jesuits came to work among the Mohawks. Young Tekakwitha longed to talk to them. The early seeds of Christianity implanted in her by her mother and Anastasia were working within her. However, she dared not visit the priests because of her family.

The years of her girlhood passed quietly. Exteriorly she was pleasant, cheerful and industrious. She became ever more skillful in carving, beading and embroidery. She did most of the housework—her aunts, Karitha and Arosen, saw to that. But when her work was



Tekakwitha became ever more skilled in her work.



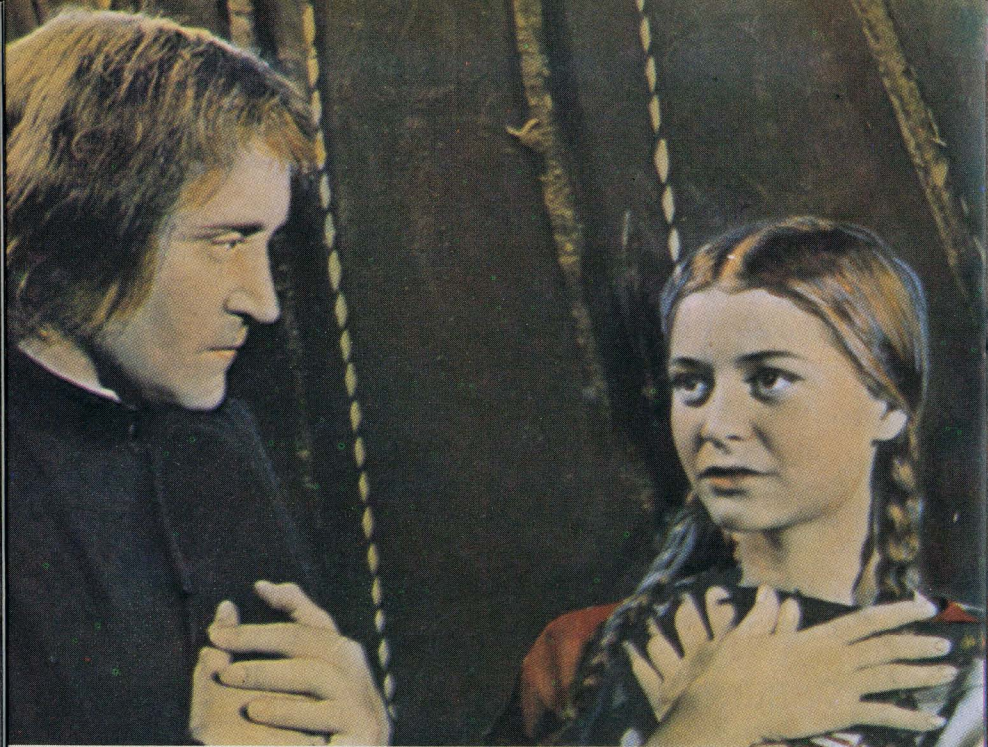
When her work was finished, Tekakwitha loved to walk along the river or take a stroll in the forest where she could be alone to think of the great God of the Christians.

finished Tekakwitha loved to walk along the river, or take a stroll in the forest where she could be alone to think of the great God of the Christians.

The Mohawks often had very wild parties and Tekakwitha tried to avoid them. She never had the least inclination to marry any young man of her tribe. Some inner urge caused her to withdraw from thoughts of marriage. She knew that the Jesuit priest was teaching the Faith to some of the Indians in his "longhouse of prayer," but she dared not go for she was forbidden to speak to him.

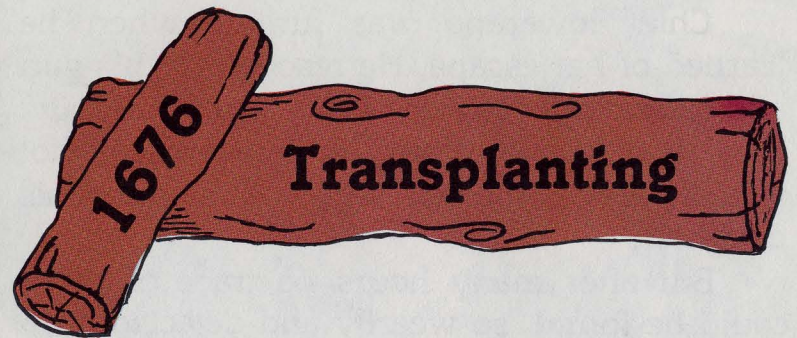
But one day when she was about eighteen, Tekakwitha spoke out firmly to her family that she wanted to become a Christian. The two women, Karitha and Arosen, exploded with rage. The Chief looked on with his "daughter." Tekakwitha did not flinch, and Lowerano saw in her eye the strong, tremendous courage of the Mohawks. He was secretly proud of it, but said not a word.

The next day Tekakwitha went to the mission and listened to the lessons of Father de Lamberville. From that time on she attended instructions and drank in the waters of truth that now nourished her soul.



Tekakwitha went to the mission and listened to the lessons. She drank in the waters of truth that nourished her soul.

On Easter Sunday, April 5, 1676, Tekakwitha, now 20, received the Sacrament of Baptism in the little chapel at Fonda, and the name "Kateri" (Katherine) was given to her. The joy that filled her whole being was visible in her face and actions. The black looks of her family or of others who were hostile could not dim her happiness. Now she was a child of God; she belonged wholly to Him.



Great persecution followed while she continued to live with her family, but prayer and penance, hard work and suffering were her only answers to cruel antagonism. Kateri did not reveal her sufferings to anyone, but gradually news of them reached the ears of Father de Lamberville. He comforted her and advised her to prepare to leave for the Christian settlement in Canada at Caughnawaga, ("Saulte, the whirls") on the St. Lawrence.

The opportunity came in October, 1677, when Garonyage, a Christian Iroquois chief then residing in Canada made his annual visit to the village. He arranged that two Christian converts (Onas was one, and a Huron Indian the other), who had come down with him from Canada, secretly take Kateri down the Mohawk

River, across the Hudson, up Lake George and Lake Champlain, to the St. Lawrence.

Chief Iowerano was furious when he learned of her escape. He reached for his gun and started after her. He knew just what route they would have to take, so he started in hot pursuit. Woe to the man who would kidnap his daughter!

But after many hours no trace of them could be found, so wearily and dejectedly he returned to his village (Ganawage).

The three travelers went swiftly along singing their simple Mohawk hymns and prayers. After three days they reached Caughnawaga, and in Onas' house, Kateri was overjoyed to meet Anastasia again.

In the home of Onas and his wife, Ennita (Kateri's step-sister from Ossernenon), she was given a section of her own, with everything provided for her simple needs, including material for art work, needlework and carving.

"How good God is to me!" she thought, remembering her utter poverty in leaving her uncle's house. "I will work for Onas and contribute my share for the support of the family."

Kateri's first visit was to the little church of prayer, called "St. Francis Xavier." She poured out her joy and thanksgiving before the beloved Presence who had brought her to this



Garonyage, a Christian Iroquois Chief, arranged that two Christian converts who had come down with him from Canada secretly take Kateri down the Mohawk River....

peaceful village where she could live and work for Him. She met the three priests who cared for the 150 families of Christians, Fr. Fremin, Fr. Cholonc and Fr. Chauchetiere.

Her new home, Caughnawaga, was charming and peaceful. The dark pines of the Canadian forest, lighted here and there by flaming maples, lay in the distance, while surrounding the settlement were glowing cornfields and vegetable gardens.

The priests devoted themselves to their Christian community offering daily three Masses followed by instructions to the children. They had no books, but the priests taught the people to sing their prayers, even the rosary.

After Mass all helped in the chores of the day. The men went hunting and fishing, chopped down trees, skinned animals they had caught and tanned the leather. The women gathered firewood, carried water, worked in the fields, cooked the meals and did the sewing.

Tekakwitha enjoyed her new-found freedom and spent her time completely in the service and love of God ("Rawanniio"). She attended daily Mass and instruction, and did a generous share of the housework. She gave away many beautiful things that she carved or



Tekakwitha enjoyed her newfound freedom and spent her time completely in the service and love of God.

embroidered, keeping nothing for herself. All she needed was a little food and some simple clothing.

Kateri had been baptized on Easter, 1676, but now it was late autumn of the following year, and she had not yet received her first Holy Communion. She mentioned her longing to Father Cholonec, and was overjoyed to learn that she might receive Holy Communion on Christmas day (1677). She immediately began to prepare by extra prayer and penance.

The great day came. She received her God with deep humility and joy. After a little breakfast at mid-morning, she went with food and little gifts (as was her custom) to some sick and old and poor people, doing for each a little service of charity. In the evening she returned to the church for another hour of prayer.

When Lent came Kateri redoubled her prayers and penances, urged on by Anastasia to work for the conversion of her race.



Kateri often went with food and little gifts to the sick and poor people, doing for each a little service of charity. She daily offered many prayers and penances for the conversion of her race.





Given in Love

In the summer of 1678 Kateri with other women of the mission, went to Montreai (Ville-Marie) to sell their handicrafts in the markets of the white people. Kateri brought her blankets of deerskin, her wampums and embroidery, the moccasins, belts and carved utensils which she had made with such skill. She was happy to earn the money for Onas and his family who had been so good to her since her escape from Gonawaga.

After the goods were disposed of, Kateri and a friend, Mary Teresa, a member of the Oneida tribe, walked along the river edge until they came to the landing place. They soon discovered and then visited the great Hotel Dieu (hospital) of which they had heard many tales. They came to the big heavy gate, and a smiling



Mary Teresa found a close and understanding friend in Kateri.

nun dressed in white opened it and invited them in. She showed them through some of the rooms; in each they saw two or three of these "white ladies," serving the sick, helping them in various ways.

Overcoming her shyness Kateri asked something about the way these ladies lived, and she learned for the first time about religious orders for women, their community life, their consecration to God, their life of service.

Kateri was overjoyed. A great light burst in her soul. All at once she realized that that was the very thing for which her soul yearned, that had been pulling her away from worldly things so that she might give her whole being to God. She said to Mary Teresa, "I am fully determined to give myself to God in a life of virginity like these white ladies."

Kateri had several talks with the Fathers of the mission, who now realized that this simple Indian girl was being drawn to give herself totally to God by the irresistible will of God Himself. Her deep prayer and penance had prepared her for such a life.

"Father, I want to make the vow of virginity. Do you think I may? And how soon can I make it? ...Father, could I not make the vow right now and continue living with my 'family'?"



"That's a wonderful thought, Kateri," said the priest. "God Himself must have given you this desire. Yes, you may make your vow—and soon. What about March 25th, the Annunciation Day?"

"Oh, thank you, Father!" Her face glowed with happiness. She did not go with the others to the big hunt, but stayed at home to prepare for the great day.



When Kateri's relatives returned from the hunt they were shocked at her appearance. Anastasia cried out, "You are just skin and bones! What have you done, Kateri?"

"Oh 'mother,' I'm all right. Losing weight isn't so bad. I can still work as hard as the rest of you." The results of her extreme penances were beginning to show upon her.

On the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, Tekakwitha privately pronounced her vow of virginity in the presence of the Fathers. She gave herself wholly to God under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was the first Iroquois girl to bind herself by vow to the observance of the Gospel counsels.



After giving herself completely to God, Kateri lived more and more for Him alone.

From then on Kateri lived more and more for God alone. She continued her private penances, adding to them when an occasion presented itself. She was always most obedient to the priests and their directions.

In the summer Kateri had a fever attack that left her very weak, even though she recovered sufficiently to continue her works of charity. In the winter she had repeated bouts with fever which drove her to her cot. But in just a few days she would be up again.

Through the month of March she lay on her bed in great suffering. She was alone in the longhouse during the day, while the others were working in the fields. Softly she would sing her rosary and other prayers. The children of the village loved her and sometimes would come for a little visit. Some mornings Father would bring them to her longhouse for their daily lesson. Kateri would enjoy listening and seeing the many pictures used in illustration.

On Monday of Holy Week, Anne, an elderly lady who was caring for her, said to Kateri, "No more penances now, Kateri; you are approaching the end."

The news was a great surprise. Approaching the end? Oh! That would be too wonderful!

On Tuesday, seeing her so much weaker, Father said to her friend, Mary Teresa, "I will

bring her Holy Communion before she loses consciousness." So Mary Teresa prepared her to receive her divine Bridegroom.

The next day, Wednesday, her friends wanted to stay home from the fields to be with her, but she said quietly with a smile, "Don't stay here; go into the fields. I will be alive when you come back."

The priest came and anointed her. She kissed the crucifix, saying, "Jesus, I love you." About half-past two the church bells rang for the people to get ready for the services. Onas and his family came in from the fields. Two priests were praying beside Kateri's cot; all her dear ones were around her. Shortly after three o'clock the priest stopped the prayers, looked at Kateri, then said, "My dear children, Kateri has just died. May she rest in peace." It was April 17, 1680. Kateri was in her 24th year.

Immediately after her death a mysterious thing happened. Within a few minutes her face became luminous, beautiful, shining. All the pock marks from her earlier disease disappeared. She was wholly beautiful. Her face changed color to the healthy hue of a child, and a tiny smile seemed to play on her lips. Everyone was awestruck...astonished.

Her little "mother," Anastasia, who had been late coming to the longhouse rushed in,



and when she saw her cried out, **Ioragode!... Little Sunshine!**" This wonderful transformation remained until her burial on Holy Thursday, and many witnesses have testified to this under oath. The rose of love and fairest lily of the Mohawk race, passing through the thorns of penance and death, reached full bloom in the glory of heaven.

*Painted by Mrs. Catherine A. Fong / Lovingly made of wood
by the artist of the same name / Always placed in God's will.*



Hymn in Honor of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha

Words and Music by Sister Mary Grace, SSMN

1. Ve - ne - ra - ted In - dian Maid! Bravest of the
2. Inter - cede with the Great Father for us all,

1. Mo - hawk Braves! Humble, strong and un - a - fraid,
2. praying now. May the crown of saint - hood's glory

1 through the Blood of Christ who saves.
2. soon be placed up - on your brow.

Bles - sed Ka - te - ri Te - - ka - kwitha!

Lily of the Mohawk Race, Winner of ce -

les - tial grace! Smile on us and hear our prayers!

Verse 3:

Child of God, baptized at Fonda / Lovely sister of us all,
Vowed to Christ at Caughnawaga / Always faithful to God's call.

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ISBN 0-8198-4701-1 (paper)