

# KATERI TEKAKWITHA



*Catherine  
The Lily of  
the Mohawks*

*by*

JOHN J. WYNNE, S. J.

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK

# KATERI TEKAKWITHA

CATHERINE

*The Lily of the Mohawks*

"Fairest Flower  
That ever bloomed  
Among true men"

—her tribesmen

BIBLIOTHÈQUE  
ÉQUIPE PASTORALE DE  
L'IMMACULÉE CONCEPTION

1855, by Rachel Est

Montréal

JOHN J. WYNNE, S. J.



PORTRAIT OF KATERI, 1681  
*By her spiritual adviser, Chauchetière*

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The sources of information contained in these pages are the Lives of Catherine by her spiritual directors, Fathers Cholenec and Chaucetière; the historians Charlevoix and Chateaubriand; the Sulpician pastor of Lachine, the village near hers, soon after her death, Père Rem.; the late Oblate pastor of her own village, Caughnawaga, Père Burtin; Father Devine, S. J., of Montreal, the Life of Catherine by Ellen Walworth, and the latest Life by Father Edouard Lecomte.

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In accordance with the Decree of Urban VIII, the words Confessor, Virgin, Miracle in these pages are used without any thought of anticipating the decisions of the Church in regard to the holiness of the Servant of God herein mentioned.

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## Contents

	PAGE
Orphan and Pagan.....	5
Christian and Exile.....	15
Flower in Bloom.....	22
Fragrance .....	35
Favors .....	44

## Illustrations

Catherine, Medallion.....	<i>First Cover page</i>
Catherine Tekakwitha.....	page 4
Portrait of Kateri, 1681.....	<i>Third Cover page</i>
Tomb of Catherine.....	<i>Fourth Cover page</i>



**CATHERINE TEKAKWITHA**

LILY OF THE MOHAWKS

From water-color by Margaret M. Nealis, R.S.H.J.

# KATERI TEKAKWITHA

## ORPHAN AND PAGAN

CATHERINE, or Kateri, Tekakwitha was born in 1656 in the Mohawk Indian village, or castle, Ossernenon, which is now named Auriesville, situated in the town of Glen, Montgomery County, New York, on the south bank of the Mohawk River (now the New York State Barge Canal), about seven miles west of Amsterdam and four miles east of the county seat, Fonda.

Her father was a Mohawk, her mother a captive Christian Algonquin, whose qualities so impressed her captor that, instead of killing or enslaving her, he made her his wife and thus a member of his Mohawk Nation, one of the famous Five Nations of the Iroquois.

Tekakwitha, or "the one who puts things in order," was only four years old when smallpox caused the death of her mother, and soon after of her father and brother, sparing her own life but leaving the usual disfigurement and a weakness of the eyes which lasted all her life.

She was adopted by an uncle, a former chieftain and still a man of consequence in the Nation.



## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

He took her to his cabin, because her relatives generally had discarded her. Having no children of his own, he looked to her when grown up to be a help in his home, and eventually to bring into it a husband who would sustain him and his wife in their declining years. The village was then about a mile further west, above Auries Creek, whither the Indians had moved from their plague-stricken home.

There were as yet no missionaries in the Mohawk castles. Fourteen years before, in 1642, Saint Isaac Jogues had been a victim of torture and a captive there with his companion Saint René Goupil, who was put to death for the Faith that year. Jogues himself met a like fate there in 1646 with Saint John Lalande, his companion. Other missionaries had also suffered there, Bresani, 1644, and Poncet, 1653, three years before Kateri's birth. These Mohawks with others of the Iroquois Nations had destroyed the Huron villages in Canada (1647-1649) torturing and killing among others, Saints John de Brébeuf, Gabriel Lalemant, Anthony Daniel, Charles Garnier and Noel Chabanel. The Iroquois were the sworn enemies of New France, and especially of the priests. Not until General de Tracy had come from Quebec and burned their villages in 1666, did they sue for peace and beg for Black Robes,

## ORPHAN AND PAGAN

as they called the missionaries, to come and dwell among them. The Jesuit Fathers Frémin, Bruyas and Pierron came in 1667. Meantime the village had been moved, first to the north bank of the River, just above a slight rapids, for which reason it was called Gandaouaghe, or Caughnawaga (rippling water). Finally it was removed to the hill overlooking from the west the site of the present town of Fonda, Montgomery's county seat.

Kateri was just eleven years old, still unbaptised. She had, however, already been through her baptism of fire, for her uncle and aunts had tried to force and even deceive her into marriage, going so far as to introduce the young brave into their cabin. Kateri knowing that by the custom of her people, even to sit next to him was to consent to become his bride, at once left the cabin and refused to return until he had left. Though a dependent, she was in no sense servile. Young as she was when her mother died, she had learned something of religion and prayer. She could therefore take part in the reception of the missionaries and appreciate better than others the meaning of their coming, especially as they were lodged in the cabin which her uncle occupied with other families, according to Iroquois custom.

## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

The Iroquois regarded themselves as supermen among all other Indians. They were particularly proud of their cabins and were known by other tribes as Cabin Indians. Even when hunting, part of the woman's task was to carry the portable makings of a cabin and put them together. These dwellings were constructed somewhat on the principle of a modern apartment house with accommodations for from five to twenty families, sometimes more. They varied in size, being usually about 35 feet in length, breadth and height; often as long as 140 feet, and sometimes exceeding 500 feet. A passage way in the centre divided the compartments, sleeping car fashion, on either side and served for fireplaces, one for every four families. Adults slept on mats placed on the ground at intervals, or on a low platform, the younger members of the family sleeping on an upper tier. For privacy, such as it was, strips of bark or skin were used.

While the missionaries remained with Kateri's uncle, she could observe them at prayer, listen to their pious conversations, notice their gentle and reverent demeanor, all of which, as she used to recall in later life, were her first inspirations to the love of God. She longed to speak with them, but naturally shy, and fearful of arousing



## ORPHAN AND PAGAN

the anger of her uncle against them she had to let their brief visit pass without opening to them the secret wishes of her heart.

There were many Christians in the village, mostly Huron and Algonquin captives, and gradually Father Frémin assembled them together for instruction and prayer. He engaged the more fervent to collect the others. He considered it wiser to confirm these in their faith than to attempt to make new converts, though he did not neglect this, especially among those who were old or dangerously ill. Many sought baptism but they were kept on a long probation to make sure of their constancy among a people who lived in lust, believed in magic and sorcery, and indulged in orgies of intemperance on liquors procured from the Dutch at Fort Orange or Albany.

Pierron baptized 84, not a small number of the 400 souls in the village, many of whom were already Christian. He aimed at creating a general sentiment in favor of religion and a sincere desire for its ministrations. He soon succeeded in getting even pagan Indians to help build chapels, one in each of the three villages. In these he had impressive ceremonies. Visiting each of the three villages every three days, he kept the faithful on the alert studying the mysteries of faith. As they were accustomed to



## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

gambling, he invented a game of cards "From point to point" (from birth to eternity), the cards illustrating the commandments, sacraments, virtues, deadly vices, death, heaven, hell, judgment. Every variety of ministry fell to his lot, even that of army chaplain.

Though the Iroquois had ceased for a time to be aggressive, they were not immune from the enemy's attack. Once the Mohican Indians attempted to take the village. Pierron during the engagement was in the front rank with his Christian warriors. After the enemy was repulsed he devoted himself to the fifty captives, all of whom sought baptism before they were put to death. Father Boniface, who succeeded him in 1670, followed his methods and gave them definite form.

Father Pierron could paint well enough to represent things graphically. Once when some stubborn Indians put their fingers into their ears so as not to hear him, he drew a picture of a demon making a dying woman put her fingers into her ears so as not to hear the priest. After that the practise stopped. He knew the charm of music for these children of nature, especially when their own children sang the hymns after morning and evening service over which he presided daily. He relied more on a Christmas

## ORPHAN AND PAGAN

crib than on his own words to appeal to the pagan Indians.

The growing Tekakwitha lost no opportunity of attending the instructions and devotions to which the unbaptized Indians were admitted, but as her uncle gradually became opposed to the missionaries, her liberty in this respect was restricted and she had to content herself with longing for the time when she could freely become a Christian. So things went on until in 1675, when she was nineteen years old, Father James de Lamberville came to succeed Father Boniface who had died the year before.

Meanwhile, if she had to witness many scandals they made less impression on her precisely because they were so common. The impressive thing for one of her disposition was the occasional display of heroic virtue among those who had been for some time Christian, or who were moved to become so, especially when the hand of Providence was clear in such instances.

Kateri must have witnessed the fervor of an Indian squaw attending the instructions, even summoning others to attend them, craving for baptism, insisting that her little son was worthy of the sacrament if she was not, and soon after receiving it losing both husband and son by ill-

## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

ness, driven into illness herself by the superstitious Indians, who blamed her for having incurred all these afflictions by being baptized, and yet in spite of all this, recovering and holding her ground as a pious Christian.

That was a thrilling scene for the young girl before all the village when a captive woman of the Loups was brought in scalped and dying. There beside her was an old hag, like a sentinel of the devil, writes the missionary, encouraging her to ignore his ministrations. A third time he had come to exhort the victim, but to no avail. Still a fourth time he comes to see her, and this time she changes utterly and receives baptism from him.

Catherine knew the chief who abandoned his wife six months after she became a Christian. She felt for the young woman when her only consolation, a baby daughter, died. She knew how to sympathize with her when the pagan Indians taunted her for adopting the Prayer, as the Faith was called. Just then, however, the husband himself returned a devout believer. He had visited the Indian village in Canada where the missionaries were gathering together the baptized Indians from many tribes so that they might live unmolested by their tormentors. Now he is back to rejoin his wife and to lead her



## ORPHAN AND PAGAN

away from the abominations of an idolatrous village. Catherine could see dimly at least the hand of Providence in all this. How her heart must have sunk within her when she saw this man depart followed by numbers of Christians whom she longed to imitate and follow!

With reason did she grieve. The departure made her feel more keenly that she was not yet one of them. It also embittered her uncle, who blamed the missionaries for diminishing his Nation and made it harder for Catherine to do as she desired. The missionaries had to avoid her cabin. She could not frequent their instructions. Even though she might have braved her uncle's indignation, she did not wish to rouse him to open hostility with Father de Lamberville.

For eight years Frémin, Pierron, Boniface and now de Lamberville had been working at Gandaouaghe. All that time the young girl had been longing to become a Christian. She had been living on baptism by desire. Her own shyness and reserve, the antipathy of her uncle toward the missionaries, her frequent absences in the corn fields or on the hunt, the preoccupation of the missionaries themselves, their going and coming from one village to another, and, as in Boniface's case, to and from the new Christian Indian village at Caughnawaga on the St.



## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

Lawrence, their special attention to Indians who were already Christian, their caution in admitting to the Faith men and women who were steeped in idolatry, by their nature inconstant, and often morally corrupt—all this explains why Tekakwitha's longings were so long unfulfilled.

What we call chance is really divine arrangement. The so-called chance that made de Lamberville one day enter the cabin of Kateri which he had passed by many a time was really God's way of answering her prayer. Though usually out working in the fields, she was home that day suffering from her eyes, and a very sore leg. Two women were visiting her, but she poured out her heart to the priest and begged for baptism. To no avail he warned her of the opposition of her relatives. She had made up her mind, and her courage and firmness carried the day. She was to continue at the instruction and soon she would be baptized.

## CHRISTIAN AND EXILE

Easter Sunday, 1676, was a gala day at Gandaouaghe. De Lamberville regarded it as the most beautiful day in his apostolic career. The Christian Indians saw in it a triumph, that one whom all revered as exceptionally modest, charitable, industrious and prayerful, should now be admitted to dignify their own ranks. The pagans for once forgot their animosity to the Faith and attended the ceremony. The chapel was a revel of decoration, the sanctuary carpeted with fur of beaver, bear, fox and wildcat, the walls hung with beaded necklaces, bracelets, wampum and trinkets used to adorn the hair. Catherine, as the missionary named her when pouring the saving waters, was the ornament that riveted the attention of all by her modesty, peace, piety and rapture. She had already won admiration and reverence. That day she won, as she walked to the chapel under the avenue of trees her tribesmen had planted purposely for the occasion, a veneration which has never ceased.

Catherine did not need to go to the Christian village in Canada to live apart from the pagan practises of her people, their riotous festivals, superstitions, dances, and other assemblies of drunkenness, license and impiety. These she had

## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

instinctively avoided all along. Instead she was frequently in the chapel and, when not engaged in errands of charity, diligently at work in her cabin, or if need be employed in the woods or fields, but always with her mind on divine things. Because her conduct was a rebuke to the dissipated young men and women of the village they did not spare her. They even laid snares for her chastity, but only to their own confusion. Her cabin companions reproached her with idleness, and deprived her of food. Opposition helped her to realise her dependence on God. When kept by illness in her cabin, the rosary was her constant companion.

The persecution continued and grew violent. She became the marked woman of the village for drunkard and libertine to insult. Children taunted her and covered her with mud. Her uncle joined with her tormentors. A young brave followed her into her cabin threatening her with his hatchet if she would not renounce the Faith, to be told: You may take my life, but not my faith. An aunt seized on a flimsy pretext to impugn her chastity. She even insinuated that Catherine had sacrificed her honor during the hunt. Fortunately de Lamberville, to whom she complained, knew how commonly the guilty party is not the accused but the ac-



## CHRISTIAN AND EXILE

cuser, and could soon disprove the story and put the accuser to shame.

All things conspire for the welfare of those who love God. Had Catherine not suffered, de Lamberville would have treated her as a fervent but ordinary neophyte. Witnessing her heroism, he felt constrained to teach her the way of the counsels of Christ. Up to this she had been so far as any one can be, self-taught, or self-made, as we say, in the ways of grace. Now she was to have the special guidance of one who practised as well as preached heroic virtue. The more she learned of the heights to which one might rise in the love of God and devotion to her neighbor, of prayer, and self-sacrifice, the more she yearned to live where her environment as well as her inclination would enable her to give herself unreservedly to the service of God and her own people. As visitors would come occasionally from the Christian village which the missionaries had established in Canada and tell of the fervor and devotion that flourished in it, Catherine longed to go there to practise her faith and cultivate virtue in peace. The village then was at Laprairie, across the St. Lawrence from Montreal, where French and Indian Christians lived together.

Youth is fond of the day dream, and the young



## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

Indians usually found material for dreams in the hunt, the fishery, the trading excursion, the start or return of the nation's warriors when hostilities were on. At Gandaouaghe a change had lately come over the spirit of some of the dreamers. They had witnessed numbers leave the cabin, some of them chiefs of the tribe, to begin life over on new soil and with altered surroundings. They had seen some of these return and recount what to Mohawk imagination must have seemed like life in the happy hunting ground, where there was no laziness, no cruelty, no beastliness, no torture, no demoniacal spell or witchcraft, no drunkenness, no licentiousness, no mad orgy, but instead industry, kindliness, decency, sobriety, chastity and innocent pleasures.

In the loneliness of her cabin Kateri would revel in the very thought of this celestial paradise. The more her craving for religion grew, and the more she was impeded or persecuted in her quest for it, the more she would naturally long for the haven where she could serve God with the liberty of His children.

The missionaries themselves had dreamed of such a refuge for their Christian Indians years before they could establish one. Meantime they tried various methods of withdrawing them from their vices and superstitions. They had en-

couraged French families to raise Indian boys and girls in their homes; they had the nuns take young maidens in their schools; they had induced adults to live away from their own people and near the French settlements, so as to civilize at the same time that they Christianised them. All this was not enough. It could benefit only a few and it had no element of permanence. Even when they had acquired a site suitable for an exclusively Christian Indian settlement, they could not get any to come there and stay for any length of time. They were using the place as a rest resort for worn out missionaries when again an apparent chance, which proved to be a divine arrangement, brought about what they desired.

An Oneida Indian Pierre Tonsohoten, Christian at heart, with his wife Gandeakteua, her mother, brother-in-law and five friends of his tribe accompanied the Jesuit lay assistant Charles Boquet to Montreal, partly to act as guide, partly to obtain remedies for his rheumatism. On witnessing the lives of the Christians at Montreal, they were so entranced that they forgot all about the Iroquois country whence they came. Father Raffeix suggested that instead of returning to their homes they should live at St. Francis Xavier's, as the missionaries' retreat was then called. There they spent the winter 1667-68

under instruction, and in the following summer they went down to Quebec all to receive baptism from Bishop Laval, except Tonsohoten who was baptised some years later. This was the beginning of a religious settlement which has lasted to our day. By this time the Indians had their own village four miles above Laprairie near the Lachine Rapids.

Reports of this new venture captivated the imagination of the Indians everywhere. Attracted by curiosity many who were returning from hunt or fishery stopped aside to see what the new abode was like, and they were so satisfied that they remained, or went home to urge their friends to go there. Christians from every tribe in lower Canada and what is now upper New York began to flock there. Never did gold fields lure more eager adventurers. Soon there were members from twenty-two tribes, all of them bent on living as Christians unmolested, many of them seeking to lead the Christian life in all its fulness. Tribes which had a respectable number like the Hurons, Oneidas, Algonquins, were permitted to name a captain or trustee to regulate the affairs of the canton under the direction of the missionaries. Garonhiagué, baptised Louis with his wife Marie Garhio, was captain for the Oneidas.



## CHRISTIAN AND EXILE

“Hot Ashes,” as he was nicknamed, was no mere political leader. He was catechist and apostle. At home he instructed and exhorted his fellows, and explained pious pictures. He made many trips to the Iroquois country to tell his former tribesmen of the new life at St. Xavier. It was on one of these expeditions that he became the instrument of Kateri's escape from Gandaouaghe to the Christian reservation. It was no easy matter. Though her aunts consented, her uncle, who was on a political mission in Albany, on hearing she had left the village pursued her. As he came near her guides, one a relative of Kateri, the other a Huron from Lorette, they feigned hunting whilst she hid in the thick of the woods, thus throwing their pursuer off the scent.

It took the fugitives four days to reach Lake George, or Holy Sacrament, as Jogues had named it thirty years before. There they found the canoe of Hot Ashes. To cross this lake, and the longer one named after Champlain, and then reach the St. Lawrence, was a smart week's journey, but they made it without fear of hindrances with the prospect of a blissful bidding place ahead, in the midst of the loveliest of seasons, the Indian Summer of 1677.

## FLOWER IN BLOOM

Thus read the letter of Father de Lamberville introducing Kateri to Father Cholenec, who with Fathers Frémin, and Chauchetière, was then in charge of the mission: "Catharine Tegakwitha is going to live at the Sault. Will you kindly undertake to direct her? You will soon know what a treasure we have sent you. Guard it well! May it profit in your hands, for the glory of God and the salvation of a soul that is certainly very dear to Him."

Their first care was to lodge her with a pious family and naturally they selected the cabin of the one who had guided her from her home on the Mohawk, her brother-in-law as she called him. His kindness was to bring him and his family many graces. In the cabin was an elderly woman Anastasie Tegonhatsiongo, who was like a mother to Kateri. She devoted her time to preparing women and young girls for baptism. What an entirely new environment it was, far from the scandals of the pagan village, free from the persecution of her own household, and brightened with the glow of an affection which she had never known! Gratitude added new incentive to her desire for an undivided service to God. She had long outgrown the disposition to

## FLOWER IN BLOOM

know merely what she must avoid. Her sole thought now was to learn to do what was most pleasing to Him.

The chapel became her rendezvous whenever she left her cabin, from four in the morning when the doors opened until all the Masses were over, often during the day, especially in winter and the rainy season when she could not work in the fields, and always for night prayers in the evening. On Sundays she spent most of the day, with the rest of the Mission, in the chapel, at the usual Mass in the morning, the Rosary, and in the afternoon with the Confraternity of the Holy Family, and at Vespers. At this last devotion, instead of psalms, the Indians used to chant things which the Fathers wished them to learn, a form of morning prayer, a prayer for Mass, another to the Guardian Angel, a fourth for Faith, a fifth, the Commandments.

"Prayer" was the word all these Indians used to express religion, the Faith, the Church and its teachings. They seemed to grasp that the essence of all religion is union, or communing with God especially by prayer. When at all in earnest they were fond of prayer, especially of prayer in common, and even its solitary practise became easy for them. In Catherine faith enlivened every prayer and she soon realized that



her relation with God was personal, that love of Him must be the only worthy motive of all she did for Him, that the slightest unfaithfulness was unthinkable, as it was a grievous offence in her eyes.

It was this purity of heart that led the missionaries to admit her to receive Holy Communion the Christmas Day after her arrival at St. Francis Xavier's, whereas they usually kept others waiting a year or more in preparation. After this the Eucharist became her one desire, and when she received it so great was her recollection, and so attractive her piety that other Indians liked to be near her as the sight of her increased their own devotion.

Winter was the hunting season and the hunt lasted four months. Few even of the women remained at home. Out over the snowbound St. Lawrence and through the denuded woods the men tracked and killed elk, bear, beaver, wildcat, fox, porcupine, otter and seal, the women bringing home the quarry, dressing the meat, preserving the skins, setting up the cabins, and doing the household work. This was the Indians' fondest occupation and often an occasion of license. The missionaries had gradually accustomed them to follow a simple rule of life during the hunting season, and to meet daily as

much as possible for prayer. They had calendars on birch bark marking Sundays, holydays and days of fasting and abstinence. Men were assigned to give the signal for prayer and to preside at it.

Catherine accompanied an adopted sister with her husband. She did her full share of work in camp and cabin. Not content with the prayers said in common, she made her own oratory in a glade of evergreens carving on one of them the cross. Little did she imagine that her journey to and from this solitude was to be misconstrued by a woman of her own cabin who was jealous of her. After the hunt this woman denounced Kateri to the missionary who, like all men of sense, insisted on getting the story of Catherine before forming a conclusion. Naturally he trusted her. In a short time the jealous accuser, unlike so many more civilized Christians, recognised her injustice and deplored it bitterly.

It was a sharp transition from the excitements and irregular habits of the hunt to the services of Holy Week and Easter. Good Friday was for her a day of sorrow and a fresh inspiration to a life of penance. Easter Day, with the memory of her baptism, brought her the singular honor of admission to the Confraternity of the Holy Family reserved for older and select mem-

bers of the Mission. With her companion Anastasie, the more others regarded her as deserving, the more she appreciated the evil of sin, and sought to expiate her own crimes as she called them by chastising her frail body, after the examples she read in the stories of the saints and of the fathers of the desert. About this time when felling a tree, she was struck by the falling branches and knocked unconscious. She was picked up for dead but soon came to exclaiming: "O Jesus, I thank thee for having succored me in danger." She believed that God had spared her life in order that she might do penance.

This Indian village of St. Francis Xavier, though Eden compared with Gandaouaghe, was not altogether without an occasional sinner and scandal. The missionaries had to fight the traders who were forever striving to introduce liquors into the cabins, for liquor would spoil in a day what had taken them months to accomplish. The savage though viciously inclined had some self-control when sober; when drunk he was more demon than man. Not all in the village precincts were Christians. Some had come there with their Christian relatives; others were still awaiting baptism. Side by side therefore with marvelous examples of piety there were instances of depravity, as when on one occasion



## FLOWER IN BLOOM

three young women determined to tempt some of the instructors of the Indians, and, failing in this, succeeded in misleading a young brave, until they were driven from the reservation.

A certain Mary Teresa Tegaiguenta had not lived up to the promise of her early life. She had come up from the Oneidas baptised but prone to intemperance. In the winter of 1675 she had gone hunting with a party of eleven, four men, her husband among them, three other women, and three children. Game failing, they were on the verge of starvation when her husband fell ill. Deserted by the others she stayed with him until he died and she buried him in the snow.

Soon after Mary overtook her former companions now unable to proceed from hunger, and all awaiting death. They were debating the proposal to kill and eat one of the party, but they wanted to know what she as a Christian would advise. She was afraid to answer. When she saw them kill and devour first one then another of the party, she was struck with remorse over her past conduct and she determined, if God would restore her to her people, to atone for her sins with due penance. With four of her friends she survived and reached the Mission. Straightway she threw herself at the feet of the mission-

## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

ary repentant, begging his help to carry out her good resolutions.

Soon after this woman met Kateri near the new chapel in course of construction, and their chance acquaintance ripened into a fast friendship. They used to meet with another friend Marie Skarichions and deliberate how they might live holier lives. Their rendezvous was under the great cross overlooking where the river widens round Heron Island. The cross was replaced from time to time until 1890, when the present monument was erected. After Kateri's death some ornaments which she left were buried beneath it. At the blessing of a new cross in 1844, her picture adorned it. There then these three studied how they might retire by themselves, build a cabin on the island, and serve God as did the Sisters whom Skarichions and Kateri had seen at Montreal and Quebec. They decided to submit their design to Father Frémin and be guided by his advice.

While Catherine was thus meditating a life of virginity, her adopted sister was planning to have her marry one of the young braves of the village. It seemed so natural that a maid whom any young man would be proud to marry should think of her future and do as others do. Indeed, according to the Indian way of thinking, it was

highly proper. Kateri's manifest disregard of fashion in dress and ornament just at this time made the sister fear she was not looking out for her own interest. Her almost exclusive companionship with the two good women who, like her, were following the rule of life drawn up for them by Father Frémin was considered as singular and hurtful to her prospect in life.

So artful was the chief lady of the cabin in presenting what she considered as the obligation to enter the married state, that Kateri, not confident in her own powers to reply, had recourse to the missionary to learn from him the Christian view of the two modes of life in virginity and in marriage, only to confirm her in love for the former. When in her early girlhood she evaded the efforts of her relatives to have her marry, she was shunning what appeared unnatural and wrong to one so young. Now, however, she was choosing what she regarded as a distinctly better condition in that it left her freer to devote her whole soul to God's service. For a time she kept her secret to herself. When urged to marry, she made it known.

To avoid further pressure, she sought from Father Cholenec a thing until then unheard of among her people, permission to make a vow of virginity. He bade her deliberate over it for



three days. In good faith she agreed, but before an hour was up she returned to tell him she could not deliberate on a decision she had long since made and would never alter. Needless to say he approved her resolution. Soon the motherly Anastasie, who had urged her to marry, came to support her resolution not to do so. Her penitent friend Teresa had all along encouraged her in her high resolve. Her vow was made on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1679.

Hunting was as much an occasion of sport as a time for securing food and skins for trade. It was the outing of Indian man and woman from the tame enclosure of the palisade and the laborious days in the cornfields. Those who went hunting would have plenty to eat and relish for it: those who remained at home must live on sagamite and dried fish or meat with little savor. Only the old and very young remained at home with those who were infirm. Though never robust Catherine was not at this time infirm. Still she chose to remain at home in spite of the pressure of her relatives to accompany them. Her reason was that the excitement and irregularities of the hunt, though not necessarily sinful, tended to distract her thoughts and kept her away from what she had now come to regard as the very

## FLOWER IN BLOOM

center and substance of her life, the chapel and her Savior ever present in its tabernacle.

In the chapel she knelt close to the altar every morning long before sunrise waiting for the Mass, her blue cloak wrapped about her body and serving as a hood modestly to conceal her features. Thither she went five times daily to make her acts of faith, contrition, humility, resignation, and to conclude with a rosary. Urge her to leave her post and stay near the fire, she would do so only for a moment, pleading, in that rigorous climate, she did not suffer cold. It would have been more precise to say she did not advert to the suffering. Her mind was intent on the altar; the altar was for her a Calvary; the sufferings she thought of were her Lord's, not her own. Indeed, so vividly did she realise what He had suffered, she felt it natural that she should suffer, so natural that she went out of her way to seek suffering and to experience it even to excess.

Some of Kateri's austerities and penances were so excessive that her spiritual adviser had to forbid them. He admired her courage, but he knew that virtue never goes to extremes. The refinement of torture that her tribesmen used to inflict on a captive enemy, she inflicted on herself. Hard labor, fasting, watching counted for naught with her; the lash and pointed metal cinc-

ture she applied to her weak body regularly; she even branded herself with hot iron and walked barefoot in the snows of winter; when she at length began to put hot embers between her toes, and sleep three successive nights in the brambles she had found in the woods, her strength gave way, her secret was discovered, and Father Cholenec bade her moderate her eagerness to imitate the saints in rigorous penances that were altogether beyond her powers. About this time others in the village besides herself practised self-torture to such an extent that the chronicler Chauchetière actually recorded the fact as due to the influence of the evil one, and as leading to a fanaticism which the missionaries had to check particularly after the death of Catherine when it began to exceed all bounds.

Half measures had no place in Catherine's life. Whatever she did was whole hearted and, when occasion offered, heroic. With an uncle chief in the village of her youth, she might have been foremost among its growing maidens, in dress, in common esteem, in social favor such as it was. Instead, she kept out of notice and resented even ordinary attention. It required spirit to decline that marriage which was well nigh forced on her when only eleven years old. It required meek-



## FLOWER IN BLOOM

ness to stand the taunts and jeers she had to bear for this. It required still more courage to leave her home and people risking pursuit by her uncle, who would have spared no one's life to recover her. Frail as she was and often ill, only a will of adamant could support her in her incessant toil on the hunt, in the fields, within the cabin. Only an extraordinary light from heaven and an exceptional influence of divine grace could have moved her to seek a perfection far in advance of what her spiritual advisers had thought of recommending to her, especially when without suggestion from them she sought permission to consecrate her life to God in virginity.

From the day Kateri made that vow, the problem of the missionaries to keep the Indians steadfast Christians was solved. Indian maidens sought to imitate her. Older women, married as well as widowed, began to have great admiration and love for chastity. Through this exalted example of their women, Indian men appreciated the purifying influence of religion, and the possibility of living as it requires. The missionaries had to moderate the fervor of the reservation. They were at last reaping richly the reward of the labor, patience, sufferings, and death of their martyr pioneers, Jogues, Goupil, Lalande, Bré-

## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

beuf, Lalemant, Daniel, Chabanel and Garnier. Once more the blood of martyrs was the seed of Christians. Once more, as so often before in our Catholic annals, a woman's devotion became the seal of faith among thousands. Kateri's influence over her people lasts to this day.

## FRAGRANCE

The inhabitants of the village were absent when Kateri took her last illness. It was the hunting season of 1680. For two months she suffered violent and weakening stomach pains, and she lay in her cabin not altogether neglected, but not as well cared for as she would have been were the people at home. She little heeded the lack of attention so long as she could enjoy the solitude and the opportunity it gave her for prayer. Those who came to visit her entered her cabin as if it were a sanctuary. They came because they felt it was a grace to witness her patience and hear her speak of holy things.

When the sickness became fatal in Holy Week, the missionaries made an exception in her favor by carrying the Viaticum to her cabin instead of having her brought to the chapel to receive it as was customary. The procession from chapel to cabin was a memorable affair, not unlike the ceremony which marked the day of her baptism. Watchers were assigned to remain with her until her death, which occurred the following day, Wednesday, April 17, when she was still fully conscious, clasping her crucifix and repeating: "Jesus, I love You."

Her death was the occasion of extraordinary



## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

religious manifestations. It was apparent that all regarded her as a saint. Her mat, blanket and crucifix were regarded as sacred relics. Prayers were offered to her. It was suggested that she be buried not in the cemetery but in the chapel. Father Cholenec considered this inadvisable much as he believed her worthy of the distinction. The Christians from the neighboring village at Laprairie came to the funeral. From the moment of her burial men, women and children formed the custom of coming to pray at her grave. The French came there as well as the Indians. Soon a cross was erected over it like the one near which she used to pray on the banks of the St. Lawrence. Novenas were made and masses offered in her honor.

Very soon it became known that prayers to her were answered in a remarkable manner. She appeared twice to Father Chauchetière, the second time bidding him: Look and do according to the model. The model as he interpreted it was Catherine herself and accordingly he painted her image, the only picture extant of an Indian maiden of that day. When the Governor of Canada, M. de Champigny was cured of throat trouble of two years' standing, after praying at Catherine's grave, his wife had many copies of this image made for distribution in France and

## FRAGRANCE

among the Indians. Many were the favors granted from heaven by its pious use. Cures through her intercession became so frequent that Father Cholenec ceased to record them. M. de la Colombière, Canon of the Cathedral Church in Quebec, brother of the famous Blessed Claude de la Colombière, director of Saint Margaret Mary, was cured of slow fever and bleeding which had lasted six months. Père Remy of St. Sulpice, Curé of Lachine parish, was disposed to question the marvelous favors granted through Catherine's intercession; but when one of his parishioners came to have him offer a Mass of thanksgiving, for favors obtained through the Indian Maiden, he felt moved to invoke her to bring about his own cure from deafness and when his prayer was heard, out of gratitude he wrote a record of the remarkable favors attributed to her intercession.

Father Cholenec had at first the same attitude as Remy, but when he witnessed the cure of Claude Caron by the use of Catherine's crucifix, of another named Roanez, a woman over sixty, by the same means, and of a third an Indian girl from paralysis and a passion for gambling, he not only changed his mind, but, like Remy, wrote her life three times over, once for the Edifying Letters, again in Latin as a report for his super-

## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

iors in Rome, and the third for general use. Other missionaries witnessed similar favors, among them Fathers Bruyas and Morain. It has not been the lot of many mortals to have had their lives recorded by such accomplished biographers, Cholenec and Chauchetière, eye witnesses and intimate observers, who have kept her memory alive by brush as well as pen.

It is no wonder then that Indians and French in Canada became convinced that Catherine was a saint who was specially favored by God. In these remarkable answers to prayer through her intercession, she was their wonder worker, their protectress, their Genevieve. "Canada has also her Genevieve," remarked the second bishop of Quebec, de la Croix St. Valier, as he rose after praying at the tomb of Catherine, referring no doubt to her protection from the cruel Iroquois in 1688. Nor is it a wonder that Father Cholenec at length felt justified exhuming her remains so as to preserve her bones sacredly in the sacristy of the Mission Chapel. For a time they reposed even under its main altar. They are now under seal, except the skull which was given as a source of blessings to the Indians of Regis when they were establishing their reservation.

Catherine's tomb however, had become a holy



## FRAGRANCE

place in the eyes of the Indians. They had seen miracles worked by the use of the soil taken from it, they had experienced graces as they prayed there, they had gone to it in pious pilgrimage, when their village was moved in 1696 and again to its present site in 1716, and they had seen visitors coming from afar to venerate it. For over sixty years the historian Charlevoix attests all this had lasted, and it had grown into an abiding tradition. From time to time the great cross was renewed with ceremonies notably in 1843, and after a destructive gale again in 1884. In 1890 Father Clarence A. Walworth, of St. Mary's, Albany, erected a lasting monument on the spot, a great urn of granite surmounted by a high cross, palisaded and covered by a rustic roof. On the stone is inscribed,

Kateri Tekakwitha

April 17, 1680

Onkweonweke Katsitsiio Leokitsianekaron

meaning

Fairest flower that ever bloomed among true men.

Though, as Cholenec wrote, the wonders worked by this "Little Flower" of the Indians became too numerous to record, there was al-

## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

ways one so obvious as to need no record, the fervor of her people after her death, their veneration for her virtues, their belief in her holiness, and their steadfast adherence to the faith down to our day. Their disposition to pay her the tribute of their worship has spread far beyond their home on the St. Lawrence. Wherever Christians read of her saintly life, there is the same impulse to venerate her, and to wish that one day she may be honored on our altars. The Bishops of the United States assembled in the Plenary Council in Baltimore in 1884 expressed this wish to the Holy Father, when recommending the beatification of Father Jogues and his companions, now saints, who died for the Faith where Catherine was born, the ripest fruit of their blood, since the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians.

At Auriesville, Catherine's memory is associated with that of Father Jogues, Joseph Lalande and René Goupil. Although she did not die for the Faith as they did, she lived as one of its confessors and she consecrated her life to God as virgin. The priests in charge of the Shrine are fortunate in the possession of a portion of her relic, kindly given to them by Most Rev. William Forbes, Archbishop of Ottawa, when pastor at Caughnawaga, on the St. Lawrence, opposite

## FRAGRANCE

Montreal, the present home of the Indians with whom Catherine spent her last four years. Many favors are attributed to the use of this relic. Caughnawaga Castle, the Indian village in which Kateri had spent most of her life and in which also she was baptised, had long been a place of interest, the spring there, known as Tekakwitha Spring, being a special attraction. It is on the hill overlooking Fonda about four miles west of Auriesville and on the north side of the Mohawk River. This site is now the property of the Diocese of Albany, and it too, like Auriesville, will become a place of pilgrimage in honor of the Lily of the Mohawks.

When about 1921 it became clear that the Martyrs would be soon beatified, redoubled efforts were made to prepare for the Cause of Kateri. The documents concerning her were collected, translated and manifolded so as to be distributed among those who might appear as witnesses in her favor. Ordinarily the process of her beatification would be instituted and conducted in the diocese in whose territory she departed this life. For very good reasons it was thought best to institute this process in the Diocese of Albany, as Kateri has spent most of her life within its limits. To this the Archbishop of Montreal agreed.



## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

At the meeting of the hierarchy in Washington September 27, 1922, a petition was sent to the Holy See to permit the Rt. Rev. Edmund Gibbons, Bishop of Albany, to take the first step toward the beatification of Catherine. Early in 1931, after the many delays which are unavoidable in such a process, he appointed a Commission of his clergy to examine testimony to her holiness. He named the V. Rev. Mgr. Joseph Breslin, Vice-Rector of the North American College in Rome, Postulator of her Cause who, in turn, designated Rev. John J. Wynne, S.J., Vice-Postulator here.

The members of the Commission, or Court, are: Rt. Rev. Mgr. Joseph A. Delaney, Rt. Rev. Mgr. John P. Glavin, Rt. Rev. Mgr. Michael J. Looney, Rev. Louis Lavigne, Rev. James Hilden, Rev. Joseph P. Kelly, Rev. Edward J. Maginn. This Commission has already examined the witnesses to the heroic virtues of Catherine and the tradition of her holiness and their report will soon be forwarded to the Congregation of Rites in Rome.

To all who cherish her memory, who use her precious relics, and who above all imitate her virtues, we recommend the custom, dating from her death, of those who went to pray at her tomb, to recite three times the Lord's Prayer, the

## FRAGRANCE

Hail Mary and Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. We recommend also the prayer :

“O God, who art wonderful in Thy Saints, we beseech Thee, grant the favor we beg through the intercession of Thy Servant Catherine, that she may be exalted in the Church, and that we may be led to imitate her virtues. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.”

Meantime the belief that prayer through the intercession of Catherine does not fail, continues to grow. Besides remarkable cures attributed to her intervention, many singular graces and favors are reported by her devout clients, many notable cures, conversions, relief in the present business depression, of which a few examples follow.

## FAVORS

Port Angeles, Washington.

October 7, 1931.

Dear Father Wynne:

I must fulfill a promise hence this letter to you. The story runs thus:—About a year ago I met a man in the hospital suffering from cancer. He was a fallen away Catholic not having gone to church or sacraments for almost 40 years.

I visited him nearly every day for about ten months, trying every way to get him reconciled to his God and Church, to no avail. I sent other priests there and they returned unsuccessful.

I began to say the rosary at his bedside at each visit. When I reached the third decade he ordered me out of the room and threw a cancer stained towel at me in his madness. On leaving the room I said: “——, I will never return until you call me.” When I reached my home I regretted what I said.

The next day on opening my mail I found the little pamphlet you sent me on the proposed beatification of Catherine Tekakwitha. I prayed to her and told her that if he would call me I would look upon it as a manifestation of her interest.

All his relatives prayed with me. They were as hopeless as I was. Two weeks ago last Wednesday, after one month of silence, the man called me and made his peace with God.



## FAVORS

I never, in all my priestly career, saw such compunction on the part of a human being, and I am asking you to mention this in the beatification of Catherine. She did it.

Yours in Christ,

Bernard Neary, O.S.B.

He now says his rosary every day and awaits death with patience and resignation.

October 15—He looks for me each day to read one-half hour from the "Following of Christ."

August 29, 1931.

Church of . . . . . New York.

Last week I got your communication about Catherine Tekakwitha and I said to myself:

"Look here, Catherine, I am in financial difficulties, my normal condition. I am going to say the three Our Fathers and Hail Marys and Glory be and the prayer every day. Send me a thousand dollars between this and Saturday."

Two days later I received in a mysterious way much more than twice the amount prayed for.

Pastor.

I wish to announce three remarkable recoveries through the intercession of Kateri "The Little Flower of the Mohawks."

(Rev.) Patrick A. Reilly, Elizabeth, N. J.

## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

The following is a statement of events connected with what I consider a remarkable favor granted through the intercession of Catherine Tekakwitha.

In October, 1922, I was very ill at St. Vincent's Hospital, New York, with what doctors diagnosed as stones in the left kidney. An operation was advised and performed. The doctor, however, as I was afterwards informed, after much probing could not discover the stones. He allowed the kidney to remain and left a drain for the irrigation of the kidney.

Being very ill after the operation, my nurse, a young man, a non-Catholic, who, however, was much attracted to the Catholic Church, approached the Sister in charge and asked her if a relic of Catherine could not be placed on Father \_\_\_\_\_. The Sister acceding to this request, also required that he should join with the Sisters and my friends in a novena of prayers asking the intercession of Catherine. This was all done without my immediate knowledge.

On the first day of the novena a stone came through the drain. In the course of the week, three others came. On the day before the novena was to end the doctor informed me that by means of the x-ray he had detected the presence of one small stone, which he thought could do no

## FAVORS

harm. On the last day of the novena, the fifth stone came out.

It was only after all these happenings and after the novena was ended that I was informed as to the fact of the novena itself.

Considering everything connected with this matter, I am convinced that this remarkable favor was due under God to the intercession of Catherine Tekakwitha which was especially asked throughout the novena, and whose relic rested on my breast during that time.

Provincial of a Religious Congregation.

Port Leyden, N. Y., Dec. 7, 1910.

Dear Reverend Father,

I will write to you to express the heartfelt thanks and gratitude of myself and family for the cure of my little daughter, which was made at the Shrine at Auriesville.

She is now twelve years old. From early infancy she was a frail child, most of her weakness being in her back. As she grew older curvature of the spine developed, and about two years ago she seemed to lose entire use of her limbs at times being unable to walk. All that medical aid could do was done for her in our own town, also adjoining towns and cities, but to no avail.



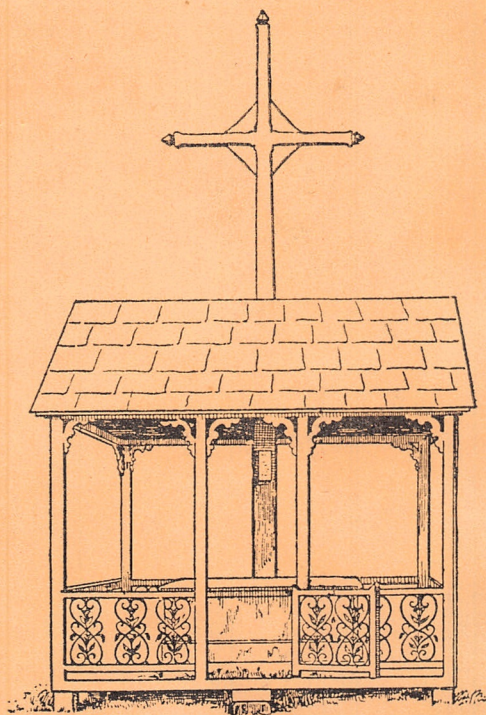
## KATERI TEKAKWITHA

During the summer of 1909 she was unable to walk, and I decided to take her to the Shrine. Although she was but eleven years old she had absolute faith in the Shrine. Many friends thought it unwise for me to try to take her so far in her condition, but she pleaded so hard to go that I took her.

My brother-in-law went with me to aid me in taking care of her. After we got her above the steps, one of us each side of her, she walked to the chapel, it seeming as though on account of her great faith God gave her strength to walk. At the chapel the relic was applied to her back. When we reached home she was much fatigued, but in less than one week she was walking around as well as any child of her age. I took her to the Shrine again this year, and as long as I live and am able I shall take her there every year. She is gaining in strength all the time and attends school every day, never having been able to do this until a year ago.

Mrs. P. Carroll.

In 1931 this young lady is still in good health and at work every day.—[Ed.]



KATERI MEMORIAL NEAR CAUGHNAWAGA  
ON THE ST. LAWRENCE  
ERECTED BY REV. CLARENCE WALWORTH  
OF ALBANY, IN 1890