P. Réal Lebel 30 Sept

THE SQUAW WHO is Headed For Sainthood

By Sidney M. Katz

The first American-born saint may be Kateri Tekakwitha—an Iroquois maid who has been performing miracles since her death 266 years ago.

SHE died at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, on a bright sunny day, while Father Cholonec was at her bedside. Fifteen minutes later, as he sat there praying, the priest looked up at her and cried out in astonishment: "Her face! Her face!"

Her face, which all her life had been emaciated and scarred from smallpox, became suddenly radiant and beautiful.

A week later, Kateri Tekakwitha gave the inhabitants of the Sault mission at Caughnawaga, near Montreal, further evidence of her miraculous powers.

She appeared in an apparition and predicted the destruction of the mission church by a storm. Not long after, she cured no less a personage than the Canon of Quebec of a deadly fever that had plagued him for six months. When the wife of the Intendant, Madame de Champigny, made a pilgrimage to Kateri's tomb to plea for the restoration of her husband's voice, her prayer was promptly answered.

Kateri Tekakwitha has been dead for 266 years, but during all that period, according to numerous witnesses, she has continued to grant favors to many who seek them from her.

Even as late as the 1930's two miracles are claimed for her—one in Marquette, Mich., where a woman made an unbelievable recovery from a condition that her doctor pronounced as fatal, and another in Canada, where an old man's health improved overnight, thus eliminating the necessity of an operation that probably would have been fatal at his age.

Today, Kateri Tekakwitha, the untutored Indian girl whom the missionaries of the day used to refer to admiringly as "the Lily of the Mohawks," is well on the way to becoming America's first native-born saint. (Mother Cabrini, who was recently canonized, was a United States citizen, but was born in Italy.)

Twenty years ago, Rev. John J. Wynne, S.J., of Fordham University, with the help of five other ecclesiastics, formed the Tekak-

conditions that match the operating room for sterility, a gauze dressing is wrapped tightly around the burns; this is kept in place by heavier bandages. The patient is urged to get out of bed and walk around as soon as possible, and for the next two weeks his bandages are left untouched.

Probably, the diet of the patient is the clue to the success of the Elman treatment. To help the system rebuild lost tissue, the patient is fed large amounts of highly-nourishing foods. If he can't eat solids, then he is given liquids.

If the patient is in fair condition and refuses to co-operate, he is threatened with tube feeding. "The high protein, high caloric diet is the essential part of the treatment," explains one of Dr. Elman's assistants, "and we must insist that the patient take his daily quota of food."

When Dr. Elman tabulated the effect of his treatment on 55 badly-burned patients, he was able to report the following:

Twenty-six patients, with burns covering 45 per cent of their body surface, were healed without skin grafts.

Seventeen were healed but needed skin grafts.

Twelve patients, who were from 75 to 100 per cent covered with burns, died.

It was noticed that, among the recovered patients, healing was more rapid and less skin-grafting was required than under previous methods of treatment.

"Despite the hundreds of different preparations recommended for application next to the burned skin," concludes Dr. Elman, "none is really required. Much more important is the meticulous avoidance of infection while the dressing is being applied. *Infection can be traced to bacteria which reach the burn after the patient enters the hospital.*"

Dr. Elman is re-echoing the words of an old physician, who, chiding his fellow doctors for an over-fondness for drugs and medicines, used to say: "It is not medicine that cures, but Nature."

Sex Triumphant

An American boy just back from India is authority for this story: The British in India were unable to cope with the malarial mosquito there and had given up trying when the American forces came in. American entomologists went to work and came up with an ingenious little method. They recorded on discs the mating call of the female anopheles, a call so high pitched the human ear cannot hear it, installed the discs and the requisite player in cages set up throughout the area, and played them. The males would come in and be trapped. The males, however, do not carry the disease, as the female is the biter, but the result of the ruse eventually was to wipe out the mosquito crop. —Marcia Winn, *Chicago Tribune*

witha League to campaign for the canonization of the Lily of the Mohawks. They studied carefully all the papers and references to the unusual Kateri that were to be found. They made hundreds of inquiries about her powers of intercession today.

Then, with a well-filled brief case, Father Wynne went to Rome to present his case for the maiden.

The Catholic Church requires that a candidate for the sainthood pass a series of the most rigid examinations, so Father Wynne found it necessary to return to America several times to secure additional information and evidence.

The candidate's works are investigated with the utmost thoroughness—through stages leading to veneration, beatification, and finally sainthood. Kateri Tekakwitha was entitled venerable in 1943, and there is good reason to believe that her canonization may not be far off.

The small group of dignitaries assembled in the Vatican to study the works of Kateri will find themselves confronted with a most unusual life history. It is the story of a simple, uneducated savage girl who died at 24 and whose tomb has been the object of countless pilgrimages since her death in 1680.

AN INCIDENT that occurred when Kateri was 15 years old marked her as a most unusual young girl. One day, her aunt, who was her guardian, remarked to her uncle: "Kateri is now 15. It is time for her to marry."

"She will make a desirable wife," replied the uncle. "She is docile and useful."

They were amazed at the girl's resistance to the suggestion. Chastity at that time was a rare quality and they could not understand her willingness to forego marriage.

The matter was allowed to rest for the time being. They could only explain her peculiarity in terms of her background which differed radically from their own. For, did she not have Algonquin blood in her veins?

Her mother was a converted Algonquin maiden. She was captured by a fierce pagan Mohawk chieftain and taken away as a captive.

Ordinarily, she could have expected to spend the rest of her life in slavery. But the gentle, attractive prisoner won the heart of the warrior and he made her his wife.

They had two children. One of them was a boy, the other was Kateri, born in 1656 near the present site of Auriesville, N.Y.

When Kateri was four years old, smallpox struck at the Mohawks. Her father was the first to die. Next came the mother, who, according to a friend, "met death with a prayer on her lips, grieving at having to abandon the children without baptism." Soon after, the boy passed away, leaving Kateri Tekakwitha without immediate family ties.

She carried marks of the disease that killed her family all through her lifetime. "Her face," writes Father Chauchetiere, a contemporary, "which was very well featured, had been terribly scarred by this dreadful plague. In fact, she almost lost her eyesight."

Her whole future life and character was influenced by this impairment. She could not stand the glare of the sun, and as a result, spent most of her time indoors alone. When she did emerge into daylight, she protected her eyes with a shawl. She became a quiet, modest, retiring person.

Kateri was adopted by her uncle, who had no children. He was glad to make her a daughter of his household because a girl was expected to do the lion's share of the domestic chores.

Kateri Tekakwitha was a child to be proud of. She was industrious, and had unusual skill in making utensils of wood and bark, and clothes from skins.

Most of the Mohawks were warlike, fierce, licentious, and dissolute. They indulged in reckless debauchery after gorging themselves on "fire water" supplied by the Dutch traders further south.

Kateri was different, a rose among thorns. Not only was her conduct exemplary in all things, but she stubbornly chose to live out her life as a virgin.

When her aunt and uncle failed to convince her that she should take a husband, they decided to trap her unawares into marriage.

According to Mohawk custom, no matter how much a young man was interested in a young woman, he never approached her publicly. When the elders agreed on a marriage, the young man would come to the cabin of his spouse and indicate his choice by sitting beside her. After a brief rite, the bargain was sealed by the bride presenting the groom with a dish of food of her own making.

One evening Kateri was sitting by the fire, the light of the blazing branches playing on her embroidered moccasins and skirt. Suddenly, a group of people entered the lodge; she noted that it was a certain young warrior and his family. His eyes kindled with pleasure as he sat down beside her. Then her aunt ordered her to present the boy with a dish of sagamite—a type of porridge.

Kateri immediately sensed the nature of the plot. She jumped up and ran out of the lodge.

The aunt was angry and frustrated. As punishment, henceforth, Kateri was given menial, unpleasant tasks and made to work long hours. After many weeks of tormenting the girl, however, the aunt realized that nothing would make her change her mind. She relaxed in her treatment and the subject of marriage was never broached again.

IN 1667, a war between the French and the Mohawks ended. To show their sincere desire to learn peaceful ways, the Indians invited missionaries to teach them.

Fathers Fremin, Pierron, and Bruyas were selected for the task.

When they arrived in the country of the Mohawks, they were dismayed to find that no one was in fit condition to receive them—no one except a shy, sweet Indian maiden. The rest were engaged in a drunken orgy in celebration of the peace.

As a result, the three priests were forced to remain in her uncle's lodge for three days until things settled down to normal.

This was one of Kateri's earliest contacts with Christian missionaries. She was impressed by their affable manners, their regularity of prayer, and the exciting things they talked about. Here indeed was a new idea for the Mohawk girl—God! She was alive with the idea. He was the God of everybody, friends and enemies, God of all men!

However, Kateri showed no sign of wanting to be a Christian until several years later, when she turned 20 years old.

She was sitting at home because of an injured foot, practically alone in the entire village. She looked up, attracted by a shadow that went by the door. It was the figure of a Black Robe, Father de Lamberville, who happened to be passing by. Attracted by her movement, the priest stopped at the door and entered the lodge.

Never was an encounter more fortunate. She felt like opening her heart, and did so. She told him of her infancy, her efforts to lead a chaste life, how she had picked up some Christian doctrine, and how she would now like to become a Christian.

The Father contented himself with a few words of encouragement. "Let us be careful," he cautioned, "don't do anything too hastily."

When Kateri's foot healed, she attended the little chapel twice daily and received instructions. When she again told the priest of her desire, he counselled further patience.

"But my resolution is taken," she answered, "nothing can prevent me from doing what I have so earnestly longed for."

Easter Sunday, 1676, was the date set for her baptism.

She was given the name of Katherine, or in Iroquois, Kateri.

AFTER her baptism, Kateri Tekakwitha was supremely happy. But she had new trials to contend with. Her uncle and his family turned against her. They called her a sorceress. Because she refused to work on Sunday, they deprived her of food the whole day. When she went to the chapel, they had small boys waylay her with stones and ugly shouts. They sent drunken men to pursue her and threaten her chastity and life. But the shy girl stood up to the abuse unafraid.

Then her evil-mouthed aunt spread the word around that Kateri was having an affair with her husband. And Father de Lamberville, who remained her only friend, advised her to leave

the country and go to the new Caughnawaga on the St. Lawrence River.

It was a pleasant prospect—but who would dare help the niece of a fierce Indian warrior to escape from his lodge?

An impulsive, fiery Oneida Indian, along with a relative and an adventurous Indian of Lorette, accepted the challenge.

They chose a cloudy night for the escape, after making their plan known to Father de Lamberville. The uncle was away from the settlement trading with the Dutch, and the aunt was asleep. Kateri sneaked down to the water's edge and into the waiting canoe.

As soon as she arrived at Caughnawaga and had settled with her adopted sister and her mother's old friend Anastasia, she found Father Chauchetiere and Father Cholonec and handed them a brief note from Father de Lamberville. It said: "I send you a treasure; guard it well."

Kateri loved the mission, which boasted of 22 cabins and a church. She learned more about Christian beliefs and went about performing the chores of everyday life.

Matchmakers were again lying in wait for her. Anastasia knew that she had once spurned marriage to a heathen brave, but wouldn't a Christian marriage be acceptable? Her relatives talked earnestly to her.

Kateri put them off without an answer, then rushed to Father Cholonec. "Ah my Father," she said, "I have given myself to Jesus Christ and it is not possible for me to change masters."

While Kateri was chopping wood for fuel one day, a falling tree knocked her senseless to the ground. Her friends thought at first that she had been killed. When she recovered she told them that God was only loaning her what remained of her life and that she would begin at once to employ her time diligently.

She prayed long hours, eating but once a day and putting ashes in her sagamite—Indian porridge. She also took to wearing a belt lined with iron points. On one occasion, while returning home with a load of twigs, she slipped on the ice and the iron points lacerated her body.

"Leave your load here," said her friend Therese, "and I will help you back to the cabin."

Kateri merely laughed, and shouldering her wood, returned to the house, not mentioning the incident to anyone.

A recital of Kateri Tekakwitha's fasts and penances would fill many pages and make harrowing reading. According to one observer, "many of them belonged to the age and place where she lived and were common practices. Others showed the rude Spartan spirit of her race which gloried in exhibitions of torture and fortitude."

Sometimes Father Cholonec had to chastise her for the extreme ways she chose to do penance. On one occasion, she picked a red-hot brand from the hearthstone,

and held it between her toes while she recited an *Ave Maria*. She made it a regular habit to spend all day Wednesday and Saturday gathering fuel in the woods and going without food.

She was revered by the community for her helpfulness and eagerness to do good. One man, Francois the Seneca, came to her for advice, and was so inspired that he spent the rest of his life winning converts to Christianity.

But the many tortures Kateri inflicted upon herself wore out her frail body. She had to spend increasingly lengthy periods in bed.

As Lent approached, she increased her austerities, always searching for new instruments of pain. She found a large thorny briar and carried it home undetected. Then at night, after the fires of the lodge flickered out, she spread it upon her bed and rolled from side to side. She prayed steadily until daylight and then hid the blood-stained brambles.

When Kateri returned for the third night to her bed of thorns, she was discovered, and word of it got to Father Cholonec. "I blamed her indiscretion and directed her to throw the thorns in the fire," he said, "this she did at once."

She became a chronic invalid. Sometimes her friends the missionaries brought the children to her room and conducted their classes by her bedside to keep her from being lonely.

On Wednesday morning, April 17, 1680, Extreme Unction was given to the dying girl. Then her close friend Therese was sent for. Kateri whispered to her: "I will love you in Heaven, I will pray for you, I will help you. ."

She then lost her power of speech. Her eyes closed, and she resembled a person contemplating, not dying. At three hours past midday she drew her last breath.

Fifteen minutes after her death, Father Cholonec saw a miracle performed in front of his eyes. The once pock-marked face became clear and beautiful. His surprised shouts brought all the populace running to her bedside to witness the extraordinary sight.

The body was placed in a wooden coffin and carried to the great cross by the side of the river. Cries and lamentations filled the air. The Indians continued to gaze at her face until she was lowered into her grave.

THE passing of Kateri Tekakwitha instituted a period of great piety and penance. It was the impression of many who knew Kateri in her lifetime that she was a saint. The idea became more accepted following her death.

Only a few months after her departure, for instance, Father Chauchetiere put her powers of

intercession to a real test. He was called to the death bed of Claude Caron, a Frenchman who lived near La Prairie. On his way over, the priest prayed at Kateri's grave, asking her to confirm his belief beyond doubt.

Arriving at the sick man's bedside, the priest found him so weak that he could hardly make a confession.

Father Chauchetiere placed Kateri's crucifix around Caron's neck. "Pray to her," he said.

A few minutes later, the patient fell onto the floor. His startled family lifted him carefully onto the bed, expecting that the fall was fatal. Instead, the man seemed to fall into a deep sleep, breathing deeply and regularly. The next morning when the doctor arrived, expecting to find a corpse, the Frenchman was sitting cheerfully by the fireside chatting.

A fast succession of cures followed. The Intendant was relieved of a two-year-old throat ailment. Catherine Foucunt of Montreal prayed at the graveside for removal of the pain brought on by migraine headache. Even as she uttered the prayer, she felt someone violently wrenching her head and the pain disappeared.

Captain du Luth, a brave officer of France, signed a testimonial saying that "I have been tormented with gout for 23 years and have endured misery. . . .I addressed myself to Kateri Tekakwitha, the Iroquois virgin. For the past 15 months I have not felt the slightest twinge. . . ."

In addition to performing miracles, Kateri appeared in at least two apparitions. The first took place six days after her death, at four in the morning, as Father Chauchetiere was praying. She came to him, shining and radiant. Beside her was a church upside down and an Indian burning at a stake.

Imagine the surprise of the good priest when, several months later, a freakish storm lifted the 60-foot stone church of the mission, turned it around, and toppled it to pieces! Following this event, a converted Indian was burned at the stake for adopting a new religion.

The Lily of the Mohawks has several witnesses that her power to perform miracles continues even until this day. At least two authenticated miracles are claimed for the 1930's. One of them concerns a 61-year-old lady in a midwestern state who was completely paralyzed and was in a coma for several weeks. After doctors abandoned all hope for her, she staged a rapid recovery that has baffled the medical profession. The whole case is documented and fully witnessed.

In recent years, Kateri Tekakwitha has become increasingly popular. The Tekakwitha League in the United States and the Tekakwitha Guild in Canada have thousands of members who pray earnestly for her sainthood and who invoke her aid. It may be that their earnest prayers will soon be answered.