



A Tercentenary and a Belt

THE wampum-belt pictured above, is carefully preserved at Mission Saint-François-Xavier. It is five feet long and five inches wide. In 1686, Father Chauchetière, S.J., sharpened himself a quill and sat down and wrote the story of the Mission. Under the heading 1677, one may read :

"This year will be notable because of a celebrated gift which was sent from Lorette to the Sault (from the Hurons of Lorette near Quebec to the St. Francis Xavier Indians of Sault St. Louis) ; it was an exhortatory (or preaching) belt that transmitted the words of the Lorettes to those of the Sault to induce them to accept the faith seriously, to build a chapel as soon as possible ; it also exhorted them to fight the various demons that were conspiring to ruin both missions." Then Chauchetière concludes by adding : "This belt was immediately tied to one of the

beams of the chapel which reaches up above the altar so that it could always be seen and that this voice could always be heard."

Kateri was there when the belt arrived. Perhaps she herself attached it over the altar. Doubtless she saw and heard the Huron ambassador explain the message of the wampum belt.

"Look", he said, "at the narrow, straight, purple path on both sides which leads up to the white cross in the center. It is the way of the commandments of God and of the Catholic Church." Then his finger ran along the white frets leading away from the cross. "Don't follow", he enjoined, "the crooked paths of superstition and of sin, otherwise you will go to hell!"

This was the lesson that the Hurons had learned forty years before.

This was the lesson the *onkwe onwe*, the true men (Iroquois) were learning and learning well. They had become Christian Indians, *Tehatiasontha*, Indians who made-the-sign-of-the-cross...

Fr. Chauchetière pertinently notes that it is the Indians who came from what is to-day Auriesville, the spot where St. Isaac Jogues died, who were the spiritual leaders of this already fervent Mission.

Don't follow the crooked paths of sin!

That was why Kateri had fled from Ossernenon, the year before. She wanted, in an atmosphere of peace and of love, to observe the commandments of God and of His Church.

The life of the Catholic Church through its two thousand years, has been the realization of Christ's words : "A grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die... ; if it dies, then it yields rich fruit... If anyone is to be my servant he must follow my way" (John, XII, 24).

These words of Our Savior apply to individuals as well as to nations and races.

The Roman Empire gave place to Christendom and the glorious Middle Ages after thousands and thousands of early Christians fell into the ground and died. And ever, it has been thus in China, Japan, India, Indonesia, and less than a century ago, in

darkest Africa, where today negro bishops and priests enjoy the privileges of offering up the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in honor of the Blessed Martyrs of Uganda.

This year, the Catholics of North America are celebrating the tercentenary of the deaths of St. John de Brébeuf, St. Gabriel Lalemant, St. Charles Garnier, and of St. Noel Chabanel. They fell into the ground and yielded rich fruit, not the least of which was little Kateri.

Did she realize as she fingered the wampum-belt message of the Christian Hurons, those friends of St. John de Brébeuf and his Companions, that they were simply relaying to the Indian of the Mission, the lesson taught them by the Jesuit Martyrs ?

She probably did.

H.B.