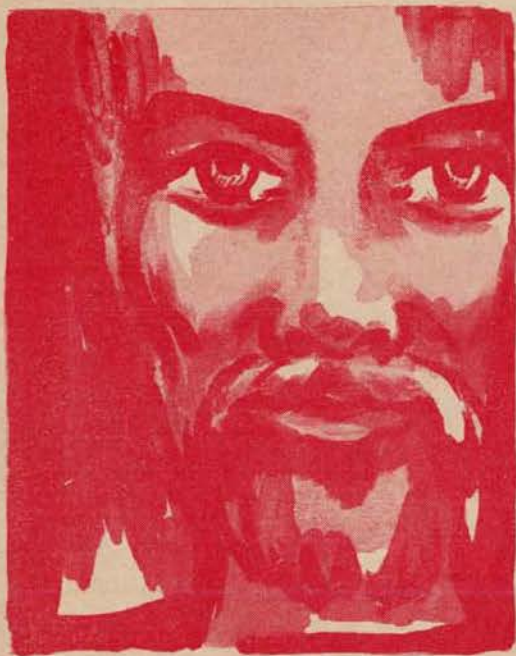


"The training of a child begins twenty years before its birth, at the moment the mother's training begins." — NAPOLEON I



C. Louglois, S.J.

ST. JOHN DE BRÉBEUF

Her Mother

KA T E R I ' S
mother . . .

The little that is known about her may help us to understand Kateri better.

Her name? . . . Unrecorded. Father Holland, S.J., the poet, once called her Kahenta, the Iroquois for Flower-of-the-Prairie.

Kahenta—you don't object, do you?—came from far away Three Rivers. She was not an Iroquois by birth, but an Algonquin. As far back as 1652, Father Buteux remarked the deep faith of the Algonquins, which flowered in a truly extraordinary spirit of prayer.

The faith of Kahenta's people was strengthened by frequent contacts with the Montagnais and other neighboring Indians, all excellent Christians. Strengthened also by the visits of the numerous Blackrobes on their way to their distant Mission fields . . .

Kateri's mother, in her early teens, quite certainly saw Saint John de Brébeuf and many of his companion Saints. Possibly, she even assisted as they offered the Holy Sacrifice before they fanned out over the continent . . . And when the news of their martyrdom traveled back along the mighty St. Lawrence, when

the remains of Brébeuf and Lalemant on their way back to Quebec reposed in "chapelle ardente" in the little Three Rivers church, Kahenta, in spite of her youth, understood once and for all what her baptism, what her religion meant. And she never forgot it.

Algonquin and Iroquois did not get along any too well in those days—no better than the rival nations of Europe . . . So they warred upon each other. And one day, Flower-of-the-Prairie found herself transplanted to Ossernenon (Auriesville, N.Y.). The fortunes of war had made of her a captive.

After the shock of separation began to wear down, her youthful vitality reasserted itself. Doubtless, the time came when she could cheerfully hum snatches of songs to herself as she kneaded the golden maize into cornbread . . .

And then, one day, her anxiety completely disappeared for she felt running after her, the eyes of the young chief-tain, her master. He was a courageous soldier, but fierce and haughty. He was a pagan; she was a Christian. Her modesty and meekness, so unlike anything he knew, drew him to her.

One late afternoon as the shrill notes of a few tardy cicadas rent the air, he sat

down beside Kahenta in the longhouse, and asked for a bowl of food. She smilingly handed it to Kenhonoronka (her Beloved) . . . And thus they were wedded in the manner of the Mohawks.

Two children were born of this marriage, Tekakwitha and a baby brother. The Lily of the Mohawks was not four years old when she was left alone in the world. An epidemic of smallpox carried off the rest of the family.

Did Kateri's mother influence the child in the short span of years allotted to her? She most certainly did. Nowadays educators admit that the six first years of a person's life are the most important of all. A child is already "saved" or "spoilt" the day he enters kindergarten.

The strong faith of Kahenta wove around Kateri's early years a tapistry of love. How often did the little one hear her mother murmur the sweet names of Iesos, Wari and Sose, how often did the bright-eyed child smile up to her as she sang those hymns the Blackrobes had taught her as a little girl in Algonquinland? . . .

Often enough to mark this child of destiny, often enough to prepare her for long years undefiled amongst pagans . . .

H. B.