

OUR HEROINE

The Life of Kateri Tekakwitha

Chapter I.

HER EARLY YEARS.



S the eyes of Canada are focused on Midland, Ont., where the Tercentenary of the Martyrdom of the eight

Canadian Martyrs is being commemorated we realize more fully that "the blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church." Contemplating on the heroic lives of these saints our thoughts turn to the saintly little Iroquois maiden, Kateri Tekakwitha, to whom this bulletin is dedicated, and who was one of the first fruits of their glorious sacrifices.

Kateri (or Katherine) was born in the year 1656 in a little Mohawk village, Ossernenon, near Fort Orange (now Albany, N.Y.). It was the same village where three of the eight Jesuit martyrs, Isaac Jogues, John de la Lalande and Rene Goupil,

had been barbarously put to death about ten years previously.

Kateri's mother was a member of the Algonquin tribe, a Christian, instructed and baptized at Three Rivers. Algonquins and Iroquois were not on friendly terms in those days so they waged war on each other. One day Kateri's mother found herself carried off to Ossernenon as a captive of the Iroquois. She was fortunate enough to win the affections of one of the Chiefs of the Mohawk tribe, a pagan who married her. Two children were born to the Chief-tain and his captive bride, Kateri and a younger brother.

Tragedy was soon to strike the little family. When Kateri was not yet four years old a smallpox epidemic struck the little village, her father, mother and little brother perished leaving the little orphan in the care of an uncle, another Chief of the tribe, a pagan strongly opposed to Christianity and to the missionaries. In fact at that time missionaries were pre-

vented from making any approach among the Iroquois. However in 1666 a treaty was signed which had as one of the conditions of peace the admittance of missionaries to the Iroquois country.

Under the new treaty three Jesuit Fathers returned with the Iroquois delegates to their village. Thus, at the age of eleven, Kateri had her first glimpse of the Missionaries. Her uncle, being of the village chieftains, received them in his hut and Kateri was assigned to look after their needs. From the records of her life we find that this first contact left a deep impression on her young mind. Three years later, in 1670, a permanent mission was established in the same village, Kateri being then 14 years old.

Although Kateri's mother was a good Christian she had been unable to have her children baptized, which was of great anxiety to her, and she remained faithful to Christ until death. At the same time of the parents' death it was believed that Kateri would also die as she was a victim of the disease which proved fatal to her parents and younger brother. However, God had other plans for the Lily of the Mohawks and she recovered from the dread disease, which left her pretty face disfigured and her

eyesight gravely impaired. In later years she often thanked God for this favor, considering it as a great blessing, as if she had been pretty she would have been more sought after and might have abandoned herself to sin as did the other girls in the country of the Iroquois.

Upon the establishment of a permanent mission we would expect Kateri to be one of the first to seek instruction, however, it is only five years later that we find her coming in contact with the missionaries and beginning preparation for Baptism.

It would seem that this was due in a great measure to the family atmosphere which was contrary to Christianity. It was during this period also that the young girl's relatives made repeated attempts to induce her to marry. These efforts were to no avail as Kateri steadfastly refused to listen to their pleas and suffered great persecution by her relatives, who could not understand how a young girl could make such a refusal. Kateri's love of virginity which is one of her most marked characteristics was in complete reverse to the habits and traditions of her people, the only possible explanation being attributed to a special grace of the Holy Ghost.

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(To be continued.)