

A Little Girl Grows Up...

(Second Day)



AT the early age of seven, the little Indian girls of Kateri's village enjoyed dressing up. Their mothers encouraged these small vanities. "They spend a good deal of time," wrote a missionary, "dressing the hair of their daughters. They see to it that their ears are pierced and begin from the cradle to pierce them. They paint their faces and cover themselves with beads when they are going to dance."

Tekakwitha was of her people; she worked and played in the Iroquois manner. She trotted in and out to get water for the members of her lodge. Her aunt often invited the child to accompany her when she went in search of wood; she tended the fire when she was asked to do so. Then again, she came home occasionally with a large wooden basket of blueberries, possibly gathered in the ravine where St. Jean de La Lande had been martyred a dozen years before. Her skill and intelligence were remarkable. As she grew older, Tekakwitha was taught how to work in pigskin and deerskin, to make belts with which the Indian women carry wood, ceremonial belts also, from precious wampum. She even learned sewing, a recently acquired skill among the Iroquois girls.

But often-times she was left to her own devices. Her little head bent, her small fingers dexterous, she ably fashioned wampum rings for her fingers, necklaces and bracelets, and ribbons colored red with sturgeon-glue for her black hair. Her pagan aunt and uncle nodded in approval. Pock-marked Tekakwitha would need all this finery if she were to find herself a husband. And husband she must have (even at a very early age), for an Indian maiden easily became a burden in a lodge, if she had no one to bring to her the pickings of a good hunt.

One companion her foster-parents frowned upon, a companion that was to follow the child throughout her life — suffering! Her bad eyesight, in particular, kept her away from group games and sequestered her on pleasant days within the gloominess of the long house.

Later on Tekakwitha was to bitterly rue her childhood concessions to vanity. Tears and harsh penances were to make up for them. And to her dying day she was to thank God for the ill health and bad eyes that safeguarded her from the sins of pagan adolescence.

PONDER AWHILE . . .

Tekakwitha, living in pagandom, was a good child. So was I, in my own small way. Since then, taking into account the talents God gave me, have I paralleled Kateri's spiritual life? (Now turn to page eight and read the Prayer for the Beatification of Kateri.)

4 ☞ Speak to your friends about the Tekakwitha Guild. ☞

"I Have Already Decided What I Am Going to Do!"

(Third Day)

GOD'S loving Hand had been at work when smallpox scarred the beautiful features of four year old Tekakwitha. He wanted her for Himself. Ordinarily young men do not think much of girls with marred complexions...

Her foster-parents did all they possibly could to induce Tekakwitha to marry. At the very early age of eight, she was "given in marriage" to a boy of her own age. But this ceremony was no more than an agreement, common enough among the Iroquois, which served to strengthen the ties of friendship between two families. The boy did not think more about this "marriage" than did Tekakwitha, and no more was said about it.

Several years later a snare was set to draw her into wedlock. An Indian lad was ushered into her lodge and told to sit down beside her. He well understood what this meant; all that was necessary for the wedding to take place was for the girl to offer him some sagamite. Tekakwitha instantly fled from the long house and hid behind a cache of Indian maize. Such conduct was unheard of on the part of an Iroquois maiden.

Time and time again the matter was pressed. Ill treatment was dispensed; sarcasm that must have deeply hurt was flung in her direction, but Tekakwitha, who was no fool, parried the attacks with amusing repartees.

After Tekakwitha became a Christian, the Indian woman under whose roof she was living at Mission Saint-François-Xavier, again tried to force wedded bliss upon her. She was a strong-willed creature and did all in her power to succeed. Kateri's intimate friend and adviser, good Anastasia, was drawn into the plot. The whole matter was finally laid before Kateri's confessor. Then the Lily of the Mohawks pronounced the vow of chastity:

"I have thought it over long enough; I have already decided what I am going to do; I cannot put it off any longer. I have dedicated myself to Jesus, Son of Mary; I have taken Him for my Spouse and only He shall have me as a Spouse."

PONDER AWHILE . . .

"To the unmarried," wrote St. Paul, "and to the widows, I would say that they will do well to remain in the same state as myself, but if they have not the gift of continence, let them marry..." Kateri Tekakwitha harkened to the advice of the Apostle of the Gentiles. Are my opinions concerning purity and chastity in perfect conformity with the teachings of the Church?... (Now turn to page eight and read the Prayer for the Beatification of Kateri.)

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