

THERE KATERI BELONGED!

(A yearly account of the foundation of the Mission of the
Sault up to 1685)

by

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A.D. 1671



THE Iroquois have their internal organization just as all the rest of the peoples of the world, the difference being that theirs may be called of mere nature, wherein much is missing. However, the faith of our newly converted Christians clearly demonstrated that there would be nothing finer on the face of the earth, if the Gospel were followed everywhere. It cleansed the new town with regard to its build-up, of naught but that which had been spoilt by vice in the older Iroquois villages.

Having agreed together during the summer of the present year to inhabit for good and all the La Prairie settlement, they resolved to establish two chiefs, one for law and order and for war, the other for the practice of Christianity and religion. To God they recommended this affair which they considered of the highest importance; they heard mass for this intention; then, assembled together, they all chose, by common consent, the two men who, effectively, were the most worthy and capable of filling these two positions. This election required a majority vote as is generally the case with the Iroquois, among whom the chiefs really make themselves heard, following, however, the suggestions of the village elders. Since then, all have obeyed the captains, who, as experience proved, lose their credit when they are not good Christians. They are strictly obeyed especially in the observance of whatever has been decided concerning public morals.

Let us here admire the power of God, which, in bygone times, banished from the city of Rome all the abominations that the Romans had placed in their Pantheon, and which they had selected from among the spoils of so many nations conquered by them. Today our little flock is being purified of all the outrageous habits

that it contracted among the sixteen nations which it had destroyed by its courage and craftiness. In this manner numerous bad habits were abandoned at once in exchange for all the customs of the Church. This is so much the more admirable as the Indians have the habit of simply following their imagination, and as they are surrounded by superstition which they all see in their homeland. But nobody speaks about it here; nobody takes it into account and all accuse themselves of having even thought about it.

Our new-born Church was thus taking form and getting into order. These barbarians gathered together from among many nations formed only one. Charity united them to such an extent that they owned nothing in particular. This trait agreed enough with the Iroquois mentality for among them fellowship, visits, hospitality, banquets and the mutual exchange of gifts are quite common.

For a long time not even the shadow of vice could be seen there and this charmed those who came to visit them. Reverend Father Frémin, head of the Mission at that time, did not hesitate to prepare them for the reception of the sacraments still unknown to these barbarous nations — confession and communion! Some were predestined, in whom grace grew each day and for whom little time was needed to dispose themselves properly. So it was that the Indians began to be seen at La Prairie going to communion as devoutly and more so than the French. As soon as the fire of the Blessed Sacrament had animated our newly converted Christians, it could not be contained within them; the Fathers of the Mission heard each day from the lips of their children the expression of their hearts filled with the Holy Ghost. Father Pierson even sowed the seeds of the Holy Family (Association) by giving a few rosaries to the eldest Christians of both sexes. The Indians on their trips through the woods made nearly as many Christians as they found other Indians in their hunting grounds, because of their faithfulness to prayer and their good conversation.

Then it was that two noteworthy trees were planted at the entry of the village. To one was attached Drunkenness, to the other Impurity, both of them vanquished by Faith. A proverb was made of this saying concerning the Iroquois: "I am going to La Prairie", that is, I am giving up drink and polygamy, because if someone spoke of residing at La Prairie, these two conditions were put to him, which had to be accepted without restriction or limit, otherwise he was not received.

(To be continued.)