

THERE KATERI BELONGED!

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

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A.D. 1673 (Cont'd.)



GOD Himself tempted this Mission by taking its support away from it in the person of Catherine Gandicteua, famous for her virtue, whose memory is still revered at La Prairie, twelve years after her death. It really was a great tribulation, because the poor lost their mother, the Christians their model, the French and the Indians their beloved. A relation will be made of her virtues which caused all to say that she is in heaven. She left to the chapel a legacy of the ornaments of her youth, which have since become precious because of the offering she made of them during her lifetime and by a multitude of other presents, which may be seen attached to the wooden beams of the chapel and in front of the altar. These gifts, which came during the following years, were a result of hers.

This death gave birth to a praiseworthy custom which is widespread in the Mission at present. No one doubts that the Indians while they were pagans had been quite superstitious in the burying of their dead as well as in all other things. As the Kingdom of God was becoming established at La Prairie, Our Lord inspired the husband of dead Catherine with the thought of making a suggestion: this poor afflicted man, seeing his wife past recovery, invited his friends to a feast and spoke to them thus: "Formerly, before we became Christians, we used to have recourse to superstitious rites to cure our sick, and sickness caused us very much sorrow; now that we pray, we invoke the name of Jesus to cure them. If they die we console ourselves with the hope of seeing them in heaven. Let us now recite our beads for my dying wife before eating". The same man after the death of his wife behaved as a perfect Christian.

The custom of the Indians is to give all the goods of the deceased one to their relatives and friends so that they will lament his death, and to bury with their dead some of the things that they owned during their life. They also erected monuments over the graves on which they painted animals and birds which they called genii or masters of life. But the husband of our deceased Catherine, in his capacity of head captain, assembled the council of the elders and told them not to follow any longer their old customs which did not help in any way the dead. As for himself, his thought was to adorn the body of his deceased wife with her most valuable possessions since she must some day resurrect from the dead and to use the rest of her possessions to give alms to the poor. This suggestion was followed by all and it has become as a law which they have since observed with care. Catherine's husband was even blamed for having adorned his wife's corpse. The other Indians have not been imitating him in this, but they give to the poor the most valuable clothes and cover the bodies with their ordinary clothing saying that the deceased would much prefer that we pray to God for them by means of their own belongings. On the occasion about which we are talking, three hundred pounds were distributed to the poor, and during this praiseworthy distribution the recipients were told: "Pray for the deceased woman."

— 1674 —

This was a happy year for the Mission because marriage was established firmly here as it is in all the Church¹. A few who were married in the manner that Indians are married, have no other ceremonies than that of baptism during which they proclaimed that they would never quit their wives. The ceremonies of marriage were not yet established, but when the Indians were better informed and more accustomed, they were married only before the Church. God has so abundantly granted His blessing that hitherto divorce has been very rare and whosoever practises it is held in abomination. The Mission was founded well over twenty years ago and now twenty men could not be found who have abandoned their wives; and those who have abandoned them have always returned after a few years to die at the village. Some explain this condition in which the Indians find themselves by saying that the power of God can stabilize dispositions lighter than wind or feather,...

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¹ Note that in the course of time, this sort of marriage was considered as concubinage by the Indians; for to a husband and wife unable to live in harmony, an aged Indian woman said that they were together as people who sinned, because they had not been sprinkled with Holy Water when they were married.