

KATERI TEKAKWITHA EXEMPLAR OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

By EDWARD and PAUL HAYES

A TYPICAL Indian youth, whether of the seventeenth century of the twentieth, would glory in the fact of his Indian heritage. One radio commentator some years back who was well-known for his informal philosophical chats, jokingly scorned the person who boasted that his ancestors came over on the Mayflower, by saying that his own ancestors were here on our shores to meet them!

● *Marquis de Tracy*

The Iroquois, the Algonquins, the Mohawks, all were tribes with traditions of pomp and glory. When the white explorers came to our shores followed by white settlers in greater numbers, there was a natural resentment in the heart of the American Indian. And we well know the story of the all too frequent bloodshed between the two races. The expedition of the Marquis de Tracy in 1666, which caused anxiety in the hearts of the Iroquois remained fresh in the minds of In-



dians, old and young, around Montreal and northern New York State for many years.

● *The fair Lily*

Kateri Tekakwitha, the fair Lily of the Mohawks, was brought up in the midst of this situation during the last half of the seventeenth century. She was the daughter of a pagan Iroquois father and a Christian Algonquin mother. It would be quite natural for a teen-age girl to feel keen resentment toward these white men in Indian country, to view with suspicion these "foreigners," these members of another race, these outsiders who were coming in increasing numbers and who must be kept in their place.

Kateri after all might be expected to take a particular stand, as this seventeenth century race problem had begun to loom large in the mind of the Indian. Kateri Tekakwitha was a princess. Her father, before his death, had been the chief of his tribe. He was succeed-

ed in this position by his brother, the uncle with whom Kateri made her home. She held an enviable position, not unlike in our own day for instance, the daughter of a government official of some rank. Of all the people in the tribe, she might well be expected to hold herself aloof from these newcomers of an inferior race.

And what about the missionary priests who were now working in the territory? They seemed to be hard-working and sincere men, but after all they were white men.

● *We must repudiate...*

Pope Pius XII once spoke these words which express an application of one phase of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ: "The only road to salvation is definitely to repudiate all pride of race and blood." Kateri Tekakwitha lived two and one-half centuries too early to hear these words, but her life was a living fulfillment of their spirit. She and her fellow Indians who embraced the Faith during those stormy years, came to realize the universal mission of Christ's Church and to live its fundamental teaching of love for all.

● *A symbol*

Kateri stands as a symbol of what happened among all those Indians who embraced the Catholic Faith. The natural reaction would have been to withdraw from these white men, to feel resentment, even bitterness toward them. But the fact of the matter is that Kateri with joy in her heart, had the waters of Baptism poured over her head by white hands. She received Our Lord into her heart for the first time from white hands. And this lily of the Mohawks amidst pagan surroundings, ridicule and countless obstacles, flowered into a model of virtue, with a character strong yet humble, devoted to her own people yet loving all without prejudice, seeing Christ and her Faith as the all-important factors in her life.

And perhaps some day we of the white race may have an Indian girl elevated to the altars of the Catholic Church as our model for sanctity. The Faith knows no barriers of race. And Kateri Tekakwitha stands in the midst of a continent working to solve a race problem, as a living reminder of where the solution to this problem lies.