



St. Isaac Jogues

# He Had Work for Her to Do

by Lawrence J. Riley

LATE in the year 1884, in the historic city of Baltimore, there was held the Third Plenary Council of the Catholic hierarchy of the United States. This memorable ecclesiastical meeting, extending over a period of almost a month, was presided over by Archbishop Gibbons of Balti-

more as delegate of the Holy See. Its decrees bore the signatures of fourteen Archbishops, sixty-one Bishop or their representatives, six Abbots, and one General of a religious congregation.

Toward the close of this most important and most impressive gathering of the shepherds of the flock in the United States, they solemnly addressed a formal petition to the Holy Father, urgently requesting the beatification of Father Isaac Jogues and his companions who had died as martyrs for the Faith in what is now New York State. In the same communication they humbly expressed to Pope Leo XIII their ardent desire that one day they might be raised to the honors of the altar a saintly Indian maiden, born in the very village where Isaac Jogues and his companions had met their brutal and savage death — Kateri Tekakwitha, "the Lily of the Mohawks."

Amid the majestic grandeur of the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, lavishly decorated and brilliantly lighted, a quarter of a century ago, Isaac Jogues, John Lalande and René Goupil were canonized as saints, together with the other five North American martyrs. Perhaps in the Providence of Almighty God our generation may witness also the beatification and canonization of that heroic soul who, for twenty years of her life, hallowed the Mohawk Valley

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by such sublime holiness and sanctity, that her fellow-tribesmen styled her "the fairest flower that ever bloomed among true men." How fitting it would be that Kateri Tekakwitha be the first to be canonized a saint, of any person born within the confines of what is now North America.

It was in the year 1656 that Kateri Tekakwitha was born in the Indian village of Ossernenon — now Auriesville — situated on the southern bank of the Mohawk River in New York State. Her father was a Mohawk Indian Chief; her mother, an Algonquin Indian, had been captured during a raid made upon a settlement in Three Rivers in Canada, and later carried to Ossernenon. Earlier she had been baptized by a black-robed missionary, and legend has it that her life was conspicuous for its sanctity and virtue.

Surely this devout mother must have bewailed the fact that the saving waters of Baptism could not be poured out over the head of her little child. Neither she nor the other Christians in the little Indian village would dare administer the sacred rite themselves, for they stood in reverential awe of the holiness of the Sacrament. They could only pray that the bitterness of the Mohawks against the holy missionaries of Christ would soon be dissipated. For bitterness and enmity and hostility there were. Ten years before the birth of Kateri, the brave and intrepid Isaac Jogues and his loyal companion John Lalande, has suffered a cruel and inhuman martyrdom in that very village of Ossernenon. Four years before their death, René Goupil, a gentle young physician who had left a life of refinement in France to offer his help, in humble and zealous fashion, in the conversion of the pagan inhabitants of the New World — into his skull had been buried the tomahawk of an Indian, and then his lifeless body was mockingly dragged through the little settlement amid hooting and jeering. Such was the character of the village of Ossernenon.

Kateri Tekakwitha was an instinctively gentle child, docile and self-restrained. Perhaps these characteristics were due to the early training given her by her mother. Yet in God's Providence, she was not to enjoy her parents' care for long. She was only four when the dreadful scourge of smallpox fell upon the population. The hand of death stole into her family. First it was her father who was taken. Then her mother became its victim. And finally she saw her only brother waste away and die. Kateri herself was not spared the ravages of the disease, but it was God's Will that she be left upon the earth. He had work for her to do.

*(To be continued.)*