



Kateri's Contemporaries
MARTIN
SKANDEKONRAKSEN

ONCE, AND TWICE AGAIN

II

In May 1675, Father Claude Dablon, S. J., Superior General of the Missions of New France, made his annual visit to the Fathers of St. Francis Xavier. On the twentieth of the month, word was received that His Lordship, Monseigneur François de Laval, first Bishop of Quebec, was about three leagues from Montreal where he hoped to arrive the following day. The Superior of the Jesuits of New France and Father Pierre Cholenec, soon to become Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha's spiritual director, went out to welcome him.

The Bishop had just recently come from France where he had been cordially received by Louis XIV and the Court of Versailles. The Fathers found him in a little bark canoe, accompanied by a single priest,

Father de Bouy, and two peasants who did the paddling. Rain, quite plentiful that spring, had drenched the prelate, his wooden crozier and his three companions. Graciously he promised the two Religious that the following Monday, the twenty-fifth of May, he would visit the Mission of St. Francis Xavier at La-prairie.

In His Lordship's honor, the brown-skinned inhabitants decorated the village and the chapel with pine saplings. Martin was overjoyed, for on Tuesday the twenty-sixth, together with more than eighty other converts, he was confirmed by the illustrious visitor.

The reception of the Holy Ghost intensified his love for Christ and incited him to share it with his people.

He had already learned that no true love of God exists without love of neighbor. At the break of summer, when the whipoorwill's melancholy song heralded the early dawn or sealed the quiet dusk, with Father Frémin's reluctant permission, he set out for the Mohawk Canton of the Five Nations—his old homeland to the south. He especially planned to reclaim from pagandom a friend of his own age.

To his dismay, he discovered that his former companion had become a notorious inebriate. After many efforts, he realized he could make no headway with him. His heart ached. To make reparation for his friend's sins, he resolved to work for the conversion of other old acquaintances. In St. Peter's Chapel at Gandaouagué on the Mohawk River (Fonda, N. Y.), he attracted crowds by singing the new prayers he had learned in Canada. The charm of novelty, blended with his voice (which like those of most Iroquois, must have been excellent), won him an audience, and so gave him the opportunity to speak of the mysteries of the Catholic faith.

In the longhouses, he spread the Gospel and inveighed against impurity, but particularly against drunkenness, which attained its highest pitch in the warm summer months. To appreciate his courage fully, one must know that he was breaking a strong tribal pattern, since it was utterly unheard of for a young brave to speak in public, especially before the ancients of the nation. The influential men, and it is safe to say Kateri Tekakwitha's Black-robe-hating uncle was counted among them, tried unsuccessfully to stop him. As a last resort, they urged him to return to Kentakhé—to Laprairie and his "praying Indians!" The Lily of the