

An Eighteenth Century Cure

KATERI
and
Father
Jean-Marie DE VILLE, S. J.

Our Illinois mission has just suffered an irreparable loss in the death of Father Jean-Marie de Ville, occurring on June 15, 1720 *. He was an excellent missionary, who, quite faithfully and with an invincible courage, used his talents for the missions. He spent nineteen years in the difficult but sanctifying post of missionary in Canada. His zeal did not confine itself to the Indians only; it reached out, also, to the French who are to be found among them and who most vex and distress the missionaries. By their dissipated living and their untrammelled ways, these men set no bounds to their licentiousness, thus prevent-

** Circular on the death of Father Jean-Marie de Ville, deceased in Canada, in the Illinois mission, June 15, 1720. (Editor's note: As this document may be of some interest to our readers, it was thought worth while to give a translation of the entire text.)*

ing the missionaries from doing all the good they could do if they were alone. This is the heaviest cross of those who so generously sacrifice their lives and their tranquillity to gain souls for Jesus Christ.

This very fine missionary, in making himself likeable to those who did practise some restraint, inspired fear and respect in the worst libertines. He was regarded as a physician of the soul and of the body. I will not dwell here, Your Reverence, on the danger he was in and on the hardships he endured in the nineteen years he passed among the Indians. The troubles and difficulties of the Canadian missions are well enough known.

He was first assigned to an Abnaki mission forty leagues from Quebec; he was also charged with the care of a French parish which is more than three leagues in size. On each feast day and on Sundays he was obliged to go say mass at some two leagues from his Indian village, a very rough run in winter. It was impossible to visit all his parishioners without going by water or on the ice in winter and, in the spring, one is continually exposed to death in these journeys. Moreover, on his way to administer the sacraments to the sick at more than three leagues distance, many times he fell through the ice, which resulted for him in a bad leg. He first used the ordinary remedies which proved useless; he then took the resolution to pray to Kateri Tekakwitha, a young Iroquois maiden who died in the odor of sanctity and at whose tomb God quite frequently works miracles, not to mention those He performs when we pray to this little saint without being able to go there. Father de Ville went from his mission to the one where the remains of our saint are at rest and there he obtained a perfect cure *.

His Superiors, seeing him cured, sent him to help our Fathers who are in the Illinois mission at some six hundred leagues from Quebec. Doubtless, God restored

** Fourth site of the Mission of St. Francis Xavier at the eastern end of present-day Caughnawaga. See KATERI, Vol. 7, No. 3, June, 1955.*