

Her foster parents were aware of the damage done to her eyes. They hoped that little by little her eyesight would become normal again. Inside the long house, the little one had no trouble; but as soon as she went out, if the weather was bright and clear, she groped her way along. They finally named her "She-who-feels-her-way-along." In Iroquois, Tekakwitha. Later on, many of her biographers — more than fifty in all — who saw her power of intercession with God, transformed her name into "She-who-moves-all-before-her".

Now Tekakwitha was intelligent, skilled in the household crafts, docile and cheerful. Her aunts thought that some day she would make a good wife for some Mohawk brave. The future husband would then become a member of the family and, besides their brother's, they would all profit by his hunting and fishing.

Although she was still very young, her aunts tried to make a coquette of her. Father Claude Cauchetière, a missionary who knew Tekakwitha, wrote in a rather stern vein: "The natural inclination which girls have to appear attractive makes them put great value on bodily ornaments. For this reason, Indian girls of seven or eight are foolish and very fond of beads. Their mothers, who are even more foolish, spend a great deal of time dressing the hair of their daughters. They see to it that their ears are well pierced, and begin from the cradle to pierce them. They paint their faces and cover them with beads when they are going dancing." Tekakwitha's aunts urged their niece to adorn herself, and, being a little child, she gave in to them. She was even quite pleased with herself. In years to come, she would bitterly regret these concessions to vanity. She had nothing else to reproach herself with.

A custom that may appear somewhat strange to us was then popular among the Iroquois. Little girls were betrothed to little boys of the same age. It was a means to tighten the bonds of friendship among families, much in the same manner that royal betrothals took place in seventeenth-century Europe. One fine day, when Tekakwitha was only eight years old, she was dressed in her finest clothes and "married" to a little boy. Both families celebrated the betrothal by feasting and rejoicing. The ceremony did not impress either of the two children, who were both blessed with excellent dispositions.

THE BLACKROBES

As late as 1663, the Mohawks had the fur trade monopoly. They bartered the pelts with their neighbors at Oranje, today Albany, the capital of New York State. They were greatly displeased when they learned that the Onondagas had invited the French Jesuit missionaries to sojourn in their Canton, where the capital of the Five Nations was established. The Mohawks were aware that their confederates were not very much interested in Christianity and that they wanted to have dealings with the French merchants. They did their best to have the Jesuits expelled from Onondaga and subsequently succeeded. Peace no longer existed between the Iroquois and the French. For many years, the Iroquois set the French Colony ablaze.



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