



The Lily of the Mohawks

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AMERICA'S MARVELOUS MAIDEN

Tekakwitha on Fifth Avenue

1960

It has been said that a somebody is sometimes just a nobody that somehow everybody has heard about. In a sense, this is true of Tekakwitha, the subject of our story. She certainly was a nobody — ineligible for anybody's *Who's Who*, except perhaps, the Angels'. And yet somehow everybody has heard about her.

Take New York's Fifth Avenue, for example.

People from all over our land, and most probably every land, have stopped to admire the rich bronze doors which adorn the portals of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. John Angel, their sculptor, wants us to consider the figures which he has brought gloriously to life in the tympanum (the space within the arch above) and those on the doors as a unified idea, having seven dominant notes.

There is Christ, represented in a 63-inch statue as Redeemer of the world, telling His Apostles to go teach all nations. Our Lady and St. John the Baptist, His closest associates in the mystery of the Incarnation, stand in the upper section of the composition. The Apostles are below. The six other notes are made by the 37-inch statuettes standing in niches, three to a door. St. Joseph is there, patron of the whole Church and especially dear to the "fighting faithful" — the Church's workers. Alongside him is St. Patrick, Patron of Ireland and of the New York Cathedral. The middle statuettes are of St. Isaac Jogues — New York State's martyr, Manhattan's first priest, and one of the eight North American martyrs canonized in 1930 — and Mother Cabrini,

raised to the altars July 7, 1946, as the first naturalized United States citizen-saint.

Venerable Mother Seton

Mother Seton, born at 7 State Street, New York City, mother of five children, stands in one of the lower niches. At 34, in her widowhood, she established a religious community in Baltimore. She is considered to be the foundress of the parochial-school system in the United States. Her cause has been introduced in Rome and is progressing. Alongside her, in typical Iroquois dress with leather tunic and beads, is Venerable Kateri Tekakwitha.

These six persons were chosen to reflect the cosmopolitan character of the Church in America. There is a Jew, St. Joseph; a Celt, St. Patrick; a Frenchman, Isaac Jogues; an Italian, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini; an Anglo-Saxon American, Mother Seton; and an aboriginal, Kateri Tekakwitha. New York and America are here symbolized as a melting pot; and the Church as an ageless mother and teacher of all men.

How does Tekakwitha fit into this metropolitan American scene? How did this retiring, pockmarked Indian maiden, who died at the age of 24 almost three hundred years ago, come to be immortalized in bronze on Fifth Avenue in the seething 60's?

Some Definitions

Names

Putting first things first, let us get her name straight from the beginning. If you can sing "Nita Ju-a-anita," you can pronounce it: Te-gah-kwet-ha. It trips liltily over the tongues of the Iroquois children at Caughnawaga, who give equal accent to