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Our edition has been carefully collated with the manuscript, of which we possess photostats. The spelling has been modernized.

*The Life of B. Katharine Tekakouïita*  
*Now Called The Holy Savage*

FOREWORD

The honor and respect I owe to the memory of Reverend Father de Brébeuf and the other Jesuit Fathers, who began the Iroquois missions, have made me break a silence of five years which I kept concerning the events that took place at the death and after the burial of her whose life I am writing.

The pressing reasons for keeping silence were the slight disposition which I saw in the spirit of the French to believe such great marvels; perhaps I was led too much by my own feelings, as I had great difficulty in believing things which I saw before my eyes every day, or because I attributed to all the French what may be said of some, who doubt that there is faith among the savages. The principal reason was certain difficulties which the Reverend Father Superior of Quebec had in believing these things when he saw them written out in a small notebook which I had prepared during 1680, in order to give an exact account of them, in order to ascertain what was in them divine and what was not.

The reasons I had for speaking were a powerful inclination and a very strong inspiration now to set forth and no longer withhold in obscurity and silence, a fact which deserved to be made known all over the land and one which God Himself

was the first to make known by the ordinary signs He uses in order to reveal to the living the merit and glory of the dead, namely, cures of the afflicted, revelations, visions, and public approbations in the course of the years, and such testimonies as are found in the processes for the canonization of the saints—the same as those which today may be found exemplified in my subject. One of the reasons was that I should not deprive the missionaries of the recompense God gave to their labors, by making the virtue and Christianity of the savages, so often attacked by slanderous tongues appear as extraordinary. This is why I have undertaken some special works, similar to this, of the annals related in two notebooks, concerning the perseverance of the savages who fought the Iroquois and who gave their lives for the faith at the stake or by the tomahawk.

In order to put these two opposite sentiments into one, I decided to take a second course that seemed to me an idea of Katharine herself, who, in a vision enlightened me to paint pictures for the instruction of the savages, and to use them for exhorting those whom she wanted to draw after her to heaven, and at the same time to write journals which could serve for my own use. I therefore commenced this work with incredible difficulty, wishing at times to give it all up; but having abandoned it, I would get strange scruples which would not allow me to live in peace or find any rest; so that I had to obey Katharine's request. The first work which I undertook was a picture of the pains of hell designed by a German, one which had been sent to me by M. de Bellemont. This picture was very effective among the savages, and the missionaries themselves asked me to copy it. The fact that it was generally approved gave me courage to attempt a portrait of Katharine which was the one painting I wished to make, in order to

accomplish what I had been so strongly inspired to do for my own consolation and that of others. I undertook it after her death, since there was no one but myself to do it. I painted some which many possess in the form of leaflets, but these were too small and not suitable to be seen at a distance, if exposed in a large place, and if they were placed in the lodges they would immediately become smoke-stained. I decided to work on that great picture that portrays the life and customs of Katharine and which at present is still in the church of the Sault for the instruction of the savages. It was placed there with paintings of the four ends of man, along with the moral paintings of M. le Nobletz.

In order to facilitate the explanation of this great picture, I made a small volume in which all the actions of Katharine are painted, all the cures of the sick and all the devotions which were customarily held at her grave. These marvels could not occur for a long time without shining forth, first at Laprairie and later at the Mission of Lachine. By accident, and without any design, to make Katharine known to the French, Father Chauchetière, then pastor of Laprairie, had left in a volume of the Lives of the Saints, a small booklet of the principal and most edifying actions of those whose lives were conspicuous. The Reverend Father Bruyas having opened this book to look up the life of some Saint he could tell the savages about in his sermon, found the booklet and read it. M. Ceüillerie had come that day to the Sault to hear Mass out of devotion, and did not wish to return without having greeted the Father. This politeness gave the latter an occasion to speak to M. Ceüillerie concerning the paper. Both admired the spirit of God which had guided Katharine during her lifetime and blessed His divine goodness in having made known to them so great a

marvel, and from this time forward the name of Katharine began to be invoked at Lachine, as had been done for over a year at Prairie de la Madeleine. The cures which had been effected through invocation in the name of Katharine, and the desire of the French to know her virtue, were the causes of a longer and clearer recital of Katharine's actions. For almost a year investigations and inquiries were made among many people, in order to verify with surety what was reported of so wonderful a maiden.

The witnesses questioned were: the person who instructed her, her companion, her "sister," with whom she spent a winter in the woods, and finally, also the missionaries—especially her director. The French of Laprairie saw part of what was written about her. These and several other witnesses are employed to give credibility to the actions she performed during the two years she lived at the Sault. The priest who baptized her among the Mohawks wrote to the Fathers who were at the Mission of the Sault, describing the manner in which Katharine acted before and after her Baptism, from the time that he had first known her. From these letters materials have been drawn for the description of her life among the Iroquois.

Lastly, something incredible and heretofore unheard of, demands greater than human proof. We have just such a proof. It has existed for fifteen years, beginning after Katharine had received the Sacraments at her death. Everything she had touched, as for instance, a crucifix which was placed in her hands when she was buried, has worked cures. Her clothing, the earth from her grave, the plate from which she ate, have suddenly restored health, and the invocation of her name has relieved several people from carnal temptations.

The Bishop of Quebec paid his respects at her grave and

three ecclesiastics have acknowledged the power she had of helping those who invoked her. Religious communities have asked favors of God through her intercession. The French and the savages continue to honor her, gaining profit and consolation for their souls and relief for their bodies.

France has honored her for some years in many places, and missionaries of the American islands have invoked her. What is still more remarkable is the fact that often several people had the same thought of invoking her without having spoken of their thought with one another, and that when the desired favors were granted, they discovered that the same spirit had prompted them all. One of the reasons for her renown is the exemplary life that Katharine's band, which was formed at her death at the Sault, has led from that time forward and still leads there today. There are some who have really imitated her, who died as if predestined, and whose lives have been written. Those who are still living sanctify themselves by imitating Katharine, whose example they keep before them in living as good Christians. When they die the relation between their lives and that of Katharine will be evident. The men as well as the women take part in this imitation and several maidens have gone to heaven bearing the precious jewel of virginity.

This work is divided into three parts. The first contains the life and death and virtues of Katharine: the second part contains the visions, revelations, and many marvels experienced by her as well as by others, for her glorification throughout the world; the last part comprises a great number of cures wrought through her intercession.



## PART ONE . . . BOOK ONE

### CHAPTER I

#### *Birth of Katharine*

Before Katharine Tekakwitha came to the Mission of Saint Francis Xavier of the Sault, where the Iroquois had professed the Christian religion for not more than twenty-five or thirty years, Our Lord seemed to prepare the place for a maiden so virtuous. This preparation began in 1670, when He inspired Father Peter Rafeix to found a new establishment at Prairie de la Madeleine, where three or four lodges of savages who wintered there with the French, became the foundation of the mission which is now the Sault. We learn from the *Annals* that they left Laprairie only because the land was not fertile enough to support them.

God took seven years to establish this new church in which may be seen Christians as faithful as those of the primitive Church. This may be observed from their lives which are given at the end and in the course of the *Annals*. By the goodness of God I was sent to this holy mission in 1677 and three or four months after my arrival, He allowed Katharine to come here from the land of the Mohawks, where she was born.

Katharine's mother was a devout Christian Algonquin woman, who had been taken by the Iroquois at Three Rivers

slaves or from the Christian women from Europe. She was also skilful in making ribbons, as the savages do, from the skins of eels or from thick tree-bark. These she colored red with the glue from sturgeons which are plentiful among the Iroquois. She knew more than the Iroquois girls, for she made baskets and boxes and the buckets used for drawing water. Her skill, therefore, was such that she always had some occupation to fall back on. Sometimes she made an instrument for grinding Indian corn, sometimes she made matting from tree-bark, and sometimes she made poles for stacking corn. In addition to these occupations there were her daily tasks in the service of the others—grinding corn for soup and bread and serving the food in abundance. Although she was infirm, she was always the first to be at work. She spent some years before her Baptism performing these daily tasks of the life of the savage. She remained at home and did not go about, nor was she a gossip. She was neither lazy nor proud, a vice common to savage maidens. She paid no heed to her fancies nor to dreams. It has been said that from her childhood she did not care to assist at the dances or games and that on several occasions she had shown great prudence. But she was timid by nature, appearing only when it was necessary. She never showed the cruel spirit which savage women have; she could not bear to see anyone harmed, not even a slave, and she thought it a sin to see anyone burned.



## CHAPTER IV

*The Misery Caused Her by Persuasions to Marry*

Among the Iroquois marriage is not only the contract and agreement of two people who intend to live together as long as they are congenial, but also called by the name of marriage are certain agreements which are no more than links of friendship, strengthened by giving in marriage a child who sometimes is still in the cradle. Thus they marry a little boy to a little girl. This was done when Katharine was still very small. When she was only eight years old she was given in marriage to a boy who was her own age. They were alike in disposition. The boy bothered no more about this marriage than the girl, so that it was only in name what Katharine's relatives pretended it to be. If God had wished that peace be made when Katharine was only about eight years old, and that she become acquainted with the faith at that time, she would have renounced the flesh and would have embraced the state for which she was destined; but she had to pass through other trials, which make us marvel at the care Providence took of her. When she was old enough to be married, they wished to surprise her. They sent into her lodge a young man who had been told to sit beside her. When he came, they told Katharine to offer him some sagamite, pretending that he spoke of marrying her, and thus force her to go with him as her husband. Katharine left the lodge and hid in the fields. The affair was pushed further and they tried again to compromise her, but she cleverly hid behind a cache of Indian corn. This I heard from her mistress at the Sault, who had known Katharine since she was four years old. Her relatives wished to use force

to oblige her to marry in spite of herself, but she resisted constantly and firmly, so that finally they left her to herself. It is a fact, however, that she was not treated well in the lodge, where the occupants had been disappointed in their hope of her marriage. It was about this time that the mission of the Mohawks was founded, after peace had been made with the Iroquois. Katharine tried to please her lodge in all other matters. She was a good worker, peaceful, and amusing when she wished to make them laugh. They never complained of her and liked her company. She was never offended when they teased her about not wanting to marry, or because she was disfigured. At this time her natural virtue, her patience, and her preference to suffer all rather than to make others suffer, kept her from sins into which she would otherwise have fallen. When peace was made, some savages came from Montreal to hunt. These hunters had given rise to the foundation of the mission which was established at Laprairie and which remained there for some years. Father Rafeix at that time worked to establish a resting-place for those who came down from the missions above, and made a combination of parish for the French and mission for the savages. The whole consisted of a small settlement and two or three Indian lodges.

#### CHAPTER V

##### *God Prepares the Place Where Katharine is to be Honored*

Although the number of lodges at Laprairie was small, their merit was great in the eyes of the French who lived there among these new Christians, whom even now they cannot praise enough. A few years ago they spoke in particular of a young man named Skandegonrhaksen, whose baptismal name was

Martin. I wish to tell his story in order to show everybody how great is the power of faith.

The nation of the Mohawks used to be the largest among the Iroquois savages. At present it is still the most fervent in Christianity. It was the nation that gave to heaven the first fruit of the Mission of the Sault in the person of a young man named Martin. His memory at Laprairie among most of the inhabitants is as fresh as if he had died only yesterday. He is often held as an example before the savage youths.

Martin Skandegonrhaksen was a very near relative of the Great Mohawk [Kryn], and it was the Great Mohawk himself who had brought the young warrior to Laprairie so that he might become a good Christian; and in this he was not disappointed. Martin was naturally good, peaceful, tractable, obedient and diligent; in a word, the only thing necessary to make a fine young man of him was the grace of Baptism. He came with his relatives to Laprairie to be baptized, and while he was still a catechumen he shamed by his fervor all those who had already been baptized, so that Father Frémin, who was in charge of Laprairie Mission, advanced his Baptism and gave him only two months trial, whereas regularly the Baptism of adults was deferred in order to test them over several years. The custom then was not to baptize until after a stay of three or four years at the mission, and then only after they had asked for Baptism.

The laudable custom of our savages of visiting the Blessed Sacrament during the day, began at that time and has continued ever since. Our Martin set himself several rules of life; he went to church at four in the morning where he assisted at all the Masses, which usually ended at seven o'clock. From prayer he went to work in the fields or to his lodge until ten o'clock, when

## BOOK TWO

## CHAPTER I

*She Takes Instruction*

The life that the "Good Katharine" led for the next two years furnishes an example for the most fervent Christians of Europe. The spirit of Saint Katharine of Sienna and of other saints of this name, was revived in her by a particular guidance of God, who made known to her at times the secrets of a spiritual life. She had the spirit of penance to an eminent degree, and she lived united with God before knowing the ordinary steps to such union.

Katharine Tekakwitha arrived at the Sault in the autumn of 1677 and lived at her brother-in-law's who took care of her until she died and furnished her with the necessities of life. Part of the support was easy to her because she was a good worker and provided her share of the maintenance. Clothing was a thing most difficult to find, a fact which obliged several savages to marry in spite of their desire to imitate the French Religious. To practise the evangelical counsels in this manner is a more heroic virtue for the savages than for the French. Several have tried to imitate Katharine, but few have persevered, unless they were widows, who, although young have nevertheless generously renounced a second marriage.

There was in the lodge when Katharine came a venerable Christian woman to whom God had given a rare talent for instructing. She was called Anastasia Tegonhatsihongo, had known Katharine at Ossernenon and had seen her mother there. This old acquaintance, Katharine's desire to know what was most pleasing to God, and the talent that Anastasia had for instruction, attracted Katharine to this savage. She learned



first the ordinary exercises of the mission, for the feast days and for the work days. She learned more in one week than the others had in several years. She was never idle for a moment, whether she was in the lodge, in the fields, or in the forest. One saw her, rosary in hand, with her dear instructress, going and coming, carrying her share of the wood. The most menial occupations were raised by the fervor and spirit with which Katharine did them. She never separated from Anastasia because she learned more when the two went together for wood than at any other time. Her manner of action made Anastasia say that Katharine never lost sight of God.

The subject of their conversations was the life and habits of the good Christians. As soon as Katharine heard that the Christians had done certain actions, she sought to practise them, even as a bee that gathers honey from all sorts of flowers. The fear that she had of offending God made her love solitude, so that less and less she met even with persons of her own sex, because she did not wish other acquaintances than those who could lead her to perfection. In this her prudence was often admirable. She avoided one to whom she was attached because she noticed that she was proud, but she made this separation without slighting the person she avoided.

Anastasia's method in instructing Katharine was to ask her what she had done in her country during the time that they had been separated from each other. She sounded Katharine on the attachment which she might have for the glass beads which she wore around her neck and in her hair. She asked her if she did not wish to marry, as she was already of marriageable age. Katharine completely bared her conscience concerning these things, telling her she had always lived according to the customs she had observed among the Iroquois, always

belittling herself and confessing her ignorance. When Anastasia spoke to her of slander which she must avoid, Katharine said she did not know what slander was. One must not be astonished that she did not know its meaning, either in theory or practice, since no one had ever heard her speak ill of any person, not even of those who calumniated her.

## CHAPTER II

### *She Seeks What is Most Agreeable to God*

Tekakwitha's one thought was to find out what was most agreeable to God. She complained to the priest that he concealed something from her which he allowed the others to practise, and that he did not come to see her to instruct her in the things which she must do to become pleasing to God. She also complained of her instructress, who was too anxious for her to marry and to whom one day she had answered that if she had wished to marry she would have done so. If anyone had told her that the state of marriage were necessary for salvation, she would have embraced it, but she doubted very much that there could be anything more perfect and more heroic for her, since she had reflected on the lives that the missionaries led among them or the lives that the Religious led among the French. In this spirit of perfection which transforms men into angels, she considered her body not only as despicable as dust, but also as her enemy. She also considered the contrast between the life that one led among the Iroquois and the one which she saw led at the Sault. She feared to fall into the sins of her people, and this disposition gave her more courage to continue in the practices that she desired to undertake. An accident confirmed her way of thinking. One day she

cut down a tree in order to get wood for the fire. The tree, in falling, struck her so violently with one of its branches that it threw her to the ground and so stunned her that they believed she was dead. Regaining consciousness she said, "My Jesus, I thank Thee for having preserved me from this accident." She arose immediately and taking her hatchet, wished to work, but they stopped her and made her rest. She said that God had granted her life to do penance and that she must employ her time well.

Another circumstance turned very favorably to her plans. There was in the village a good Christian woman named Marie Therese, an Oneida, who had been baptized there, and who after her Baptism fell unfortunately into drunkenness. After coming to the Sault she changed her manner of living entirely, due to a surprising accident which was the cause of her conversion. She had been married before she was baptized, but not in the rite of the Church.

She had gone on the autumn hunt with a band of twelve people. The hunting ground was along the large river flowing towards the Ottawas. Hunger pressed them to such an extent that they ate one another. When they ate the first one, who was an old man, they asked this woman if it were permissible to kill him, and what the Christian law said about it, for she was the only one among them who had been baptized. Since she did not dare to answer, they gave reasons why this man should give up his right to live, saying that he would give a great deal of trouble on the way. The woman feared that if she consented to homicide, they would kill her to sustain the life of the others. She thought only of the misfortune of having come to the hunt without going to confession, and promised that if she arrived at the village she would confess at once

and change her life. After having eaten the man, the band descended to Montreal. Several others of the band died and were eaten in order to save the lives of those that remained. Finally they found a wolf, which was a great boon for the poor starving band. When they arrived at the savage village the band was reduced from twelve to three very thin and almost dead persons. Marie Therese Tegaiguenta confessed as she had promised and changed her life completely. God gave her Katharine as a companion. She had the same thought of living in the service of God without marrying.

The first meeting between Katharine and Marie Therese was a singular one. The first chapel was being built at the Sault, and the carpenters were working on the paneling. Katharine and Marie Therese walked inside and outside the chapel without speaking and without being known to one another, because Katharine had arrived from the Mohawks only in the autumn, and this chapel was finished in the spring following [1678]. Marie Therese came from the Oneidas, where she had not heard Katharine spoken of; but the spirit of faith animated and united them perfectly. They greeted and spoke and their words were in accord with the sentiments of their hearts.

Katharine asked where the women took their seats in the chapel. Therese showed her the place where she thought they ought to be. Katharine said that in truth this wooden chapel was not what God asked the most, but that He asked to be in their own hearts; that they did not merit to be in the church with these others, because they had often exiled their Lord from their hearts and that they deserved to be put out of the church with the dogs. This long discourse was mingled with devotional tears. Their hearts opened little by little while talking, and they began to think of their past lives. In order

to converse more leisurely they sat down at the foot of the cross which was placed outside of the church on the bank of the river. They told each other all the secrets of their hearts and promised never to be separated from each other, and that they would both do great penance for their sins.

This spirit of penance was inspired first by their instructress, Anastasia, who spoke often of hell, of the great penances that the first Christians had voluntarily performed, of the necessity that they had for penance, since they had lived so badly in their own countries. Katharine took these instructions as if she had great need of them, although it is evident from all that we have seen concerning her in Book One that her life was very innocent. She followed the instructions given those who are still in the purgative life, although she had lived in the unitive life, and sought only what was most pleasing to God.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Remarkable Progress Under Guidance of the Holy Ghost*

The missionary Fathers, her directors, aided Katharine in the beginnings of her spiritual life, but left much that many of their neophytes (especially Katharine), were capable of, to the Holy Spirit. The Fathers were surprised at the real progress the new Christians made in all the Christian virtues. But they did not as yet know in detail everything that transpired between Katharine and her companion. Their principal director, Father Frémin, had gone to France in the interest of his mission, and Father Cholenec was so busy that he had time only for general management. He was certain, however, that they would do nothing, especially concerning the manner of life they wished to lead, without consulting their confessor.

For example, each day Katharine and Therese performed some act of devotion which was proper and suitable for their aim. Marie Therese Tegaiaguenta thought that it would be better if there were a third, or if they had some other Christian girl with them from whom they could learn all they wished to know. She added that she knew one named Marie Skarichions, who had lived for a long time at Quebec and at the Mission of Our Lady of Lorette, conducted on the same plan as the Mission of the Sault. When Katharine agreed with her companion's suggestion, the three assembled at the foot of the cross, which was planted on the riverside. There the elder companion spoke first, expressed her desire to join them, and proposed that they adopt the rule of life of the Religious she had seen while she was an invalid at Quebec. This meant that they should never separate, that they should dress alike, and if possible, live in the same cabin. Accordingly they chose as their home an island called Heron Island. All this was made part of their deliberations, because they had but little concept of the basic foundations of religious life. Katharine thanked the speaker with tears of joy in her eyes, and begged her to keep nothing from them which would make them more pleasing to God. Although the others had persisted in their resolution to give themselves entirely to God and never to marry, none of them had profited as much as Katharine in perseveringly following the rule of life which her confessor had given her.

Her custom was to go to church at four o'clock in the morning, winter and summer. In winter, she walked barefoot through the snow. Each day she heard two Masses and frequently visited the Blessed Sacrament. She went to confession weekly, received Holy Communion as often as possible, and made Spiritual Communions frequently during the day. Her

great devotion and fervor of spirit qualified her for admission to the Society of the Holy Family almost as soon as she had arrived from the Iroquois. She had been exempted from taking the tests which other arrivals and newly baptized were required to pass before being allowed to receive Holy Communion or before admission into the Society of the Holy Family.

#### CHAPTER IV

##### *Katharine and Her Companion Submit Their Devotions to the Judgment of Obedience*

One of the principal signs that what was happening in Katharine's soul was the work of God, was the obedience with which these three persons submitted their resolution to live as Religious. When they arrived at their decision, one of them went at once to Father Frémin and told him that they had formed an association, yet wished to do nothing unadvised.

The priest made light of all these beautiful plans. He told them they were as yet too young in the faith for such a singular project; that Heron Island was so far removed from the village that all the young people who were passing to or from Montreal would be always at their cabin. They themselves saw that what the priest said was reasonable, and forthwith abandoned their idea of a monastery on Heron Island.

Nevertheless, Father Frémin was surprised, and thought that it was time for him to speak to Katharine of things he could not as yet speak to the others. She had come to him, and opening her heart had asked him if it would be absolutely necessary for her to marry in order to be a good Christian, for so she had been told by her instructress. The priest explained the different states of life, telling her that God has left us free

to marry or not, as we please. This filled her with joy, and she decided no longer to question the state of life which God had planned for her.

Katharine entered with renewed fervor into the preparations for the feasts of Saint Francis Xavier, patron of the Sault, and for Christmas, which was drawing near. This would be the second Christmas she had spent at the Sault, for it was a year and a half since she had come from her own country. She would have cut her hair if the fear of seeming too virtuous had not overwhelmed her, and so she contented herself with wearing it like the other modest young girls of the village. Father Frémin had given her a rule of life different from that of the others. He instructed her to be retiring, above all; that in summer, when the canoes of the Ottawas would come, she must stay in her cabin and not go to the river bank with the others to see their arrival. She also obeyed his wish in never going to Montreal; in fact, he needed but to say a thing once for her to obey him. It became a common thing in the village to say that Katharine was never any place but in her cabin or in the church, and that she knew but two roads: to her field and to her cabin. She had also prescribed some rules of conduct for herself, of which the following are some.

Being a young savage of twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, she naturally liked to be well dressed. This consisted in having the hair well greased, parted, and braided in a long plait which hung down the back; it meant heavy necklaces of glass beads, pretty cloaks, dresses, moccasins, and pack saddles. In a word, they were very vain. Katharine thought she could give up all these things without seeming peculiar, as the rest would only think that she was not seeking a husband. She renounced all the red clothing and ornaments of the savages