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ODYSSEY OF A MARTYR-DOCTOR*

For the Goupil Tercentenary

1642-1942

By MICHAEL F. McPHELIN, S.J.

Of René Goupil, St. Isaac Jogues wrote with undisguised admiration: "It was on the 29th of September, the feast of St. Michael, when this angel in innocence and this martyr of Jesus Christ gave his life for Him Who had given him his."

The year was 1642. St. Isaac had returned from the Huron country to Canada, but before going back to New York had persuaded the Jesuit Superior of the Mission to allow him to take Goupil with him. René was a valuable asset, for he was by profession a doctor, and by practice a skilled surgeon. He had entered the Company's Novitiate back in France, but poor health forced him after a few months to abandon the life. When he had finished his medical studies he came to the New World, attached himself to the Indian Mission, and submitted himself to obey in all things the Superior in Canada.

He never reached the Huron country. His party was on its way by canoe when it was easily overpowered by an Iroquois ambush. It was during this captivity, six weeks before his death, that he was privileged to pronounce the vows which bound him

to the Society of Jesus.

There was little prelude to his death. St. Isaac Jogues gives us the following vivid account: "He was in a cabin where he nearly always said the prayers,—which little pleased a superstitious old man who was there. One day, seeing a little child of three or four years in the cabin,—with an excess of devotion and of love for the Cross, and with a simplicity which we who are more prudent than he, according to the flesh, would not have shown,—he took off his cap, put it on this child's head, and made a great sign of the Cross on its body. The old man, seeing that, commanded a young man of his cabin, who was about to leave for the war, to kill him,—which order he executed.

"Even the child's mother told me: that it was because of this sign of the Cross that he had been killed. The old man who had given the command said to me: 'That is what we hate; that is why they have killed thy companion, and why they will kill thee.'

"Here ends the Odyssey of René Goupil, the surgeon-saint. His bones lie still in the quiet ravine. They have made of that place the hallowed reliquary of America's proto-martyr."

* Extracts from article in *The Pilgrim*, Auriesville, N. Y.