

"They spoke only good of her . . ."

OUR HEROINE

The Life of Kateri Tekakwitha

Chapter II.

HER BAPTISM

(Easter Sunday, 1675)

The little Iroquois orphan had been a pagan for eighteen years when God sent her an illness which was to be the turning point in her life.

It was a bright spring day when Father de Lamberville, passing through the village, felt compelled to enter the lodge of Kateri's uncle. He hesitated to do so because he knew that the man did not like the French of Montreal and also because it was a time at which the people would surely be at work in the fields. Still feeling a compulsion to enter he did so and found Kateri alone. A sore foot and her usual ill health had forced her to remain at home. She eagerly told him of her desire to speak to him but that she did not

dare to go to see him for fear of what her uncle would do to keep her from being baptized.

Father de Lamberville encouraged her to come to the chapel to pray. She accepted this advice so completely that it was soon known that anyone who wished to speak to Kateri should seek her out either in her lodge or in the chapel, as they were the only two places she frequented. No one prevented her from visiting the chapel and the villagers believed that the family had become used to seeing Kateri's mother at prayer and thus were not disturbed by her daughter's interest in Christianity.

Before baptizing the young Indian maiden Father de Lamberville inquired into her life

and customs and found that those of her lodge and indeed the whole village spoke only good of her. His decision to baptize her was a cause of



rejoicing amongst the Christians. When news of his decision reached her she was exceedingly happy. She had learned her prayers with a quickness and eagerness which was truly marvellous, out of fear that Baptism might be refused her due to lack of knowledge.

The day chosen for her Baptism was Easter Sunday, 1675, the place, the village chapel. Together with two others she was baptized with all the ceremonies of the Church and given the name Katherine.

Father Chauchetière, who was present at her death, writes of her: "The Holy Ghost, entering into Katherine at baptism, made her His beloved spouse, placed her among the souls of the elect and raised her in four years to a high degree of holiness. He allowed her to remain for two years in the lodge to triumph over the unbelief of the Iroquois, to serve as an example for the new church of the Mohawks, and to increase her merit by many trials".

One of the great trials of the Missionaries was that the Indians, very often became indifferent almost as soon as they had been baptized. Sometimes they became worse than they were before baptism because they did not have the courage to disregard the human respect which is a common fault of these people. No doubt the devil was hard at work on these new Christians to make

them lose grace as soon as they had received it. It was not easy to lead a good Christian life in the country of the Iroquois. Not only did Katherine practice her religion in such a way as to evoke the praise of her confessor but her extraordinary virtue was remarked by everyone, Christian and heathen alike.

The little Lily of the Mohawks observed faithfully the rules of life which the priest had prescribed: to go to morning and evening prayer every day; to assist at mass on Sunday, and to avoid the following: assistance at the 'dream feasts', dances or at other gatherings which were contrary to purity; and the liquor debauches of the heathens. These general rules held for others but Katherine had done all that before baptism, so the priest gave her more particular directions and regulated the prayers which she should say and the practices of virtue she should adopt.

Following her death he declared that, after careful examination, he had not noticed one point in which she had relaxed since she became a Christian. It hardly seems possible that Kateri acted only from natural goodness. She had for two years, the first after her baptism, a very hard novitiate during which she displayed great virtue.

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