

# OUR HEROINE

## THE LIFE OF KATERI TEKAKWITHA

by Lorraine Fitzgerald

### CHAPTER IV KATERI LEAVES FOR THE MISSION OF THE SAULT.

Kateri had long hoped to leave her native village where pagan opposition made the practice of her religion difficult. Her only desire was to be among Christians; thus the Mission of the Sault attracted her.

Fervor was very great at the Sault when God chose to conduct Kateri there and inspired the Christian there to make apostolic visits to their country to convert their relatives. Louis Ogeratarihen, which means Hot Powder, or Hot Ashes, was a prominent chief of the Oneida tribe. While on a trip to Montreal, he decided to remain at the Mission of the Sault nearby and there he was joined by his wife Marie Garhi, and both were baptized. Hot Ashes, as we shall call him, with Kateri's cousin and another Indian set out to preach to the Mohawks of the village where Kateri lived. On their arrival they went to the church to begin their visit by prayer. Father James de Lamberville received them happily. The

elders were the first to visit the newcomers from Montreal. Providentially Kateri's uncle was with the Dutch at the time, a fact which facilitated her departure. When the audience was sufficiently large, Hot Ashes spoke to them. He reminded them that he had formerly been an Oneida chief, a warrior and one of themselves; but (he told them) in those days he had been nothing but a dog, and had only begun to be a man in the last few months... Such a talk did not please his audience and one by one they left until the preacher was almost alone.

Kateri could not tear herself away from the newcomers. She told the priest that she must go away even though it cost her life. Father de Lamberville spoke to Hot Ashes and his companions and the chief replied that as he intended to go to preach to the Oneidas there would be room for Kateri in the canoe. Kateri embarked secretly with the two companions of Hot Ashes.

Thus she left her native village where three of the eight Jesuit martyrs, Isaac Jogues, John de la Lande and René Goupil, had suffered and died to bring Christianity to the natives about thirty years previously.

Not long after he joined the Christians at the Sault, Hot Ashes was made their fourth chieftain, an honor of which he proved himself worthy. He was an ardent catechist and made many converts and during his administration he practically banished drinking and debauchery from the settlement.

When it became necessary to go to war against the Sencas, Hot Ashes told his wife always to remain a good Christian, for he knew he would never return, that he would be killed in battle. Only two people of his village were killed in battle and Hot Ashes was one of them. As soon as he was hit he offered himself to God as a sacrifice. He died while praying July 14, 1687. Such was the man whom God had chosen to rescue Kateri from the Iroquois.

When Kateri's disappearance was discovered, messengers were immediately sent to her Uncle with the news. He instantly set out to find the travelers and if possible kill them. He loaded his gun with three bullets for this purpose, and although he searched thoroughly for his niece and her companions they eluded him by disembarking and hiding in the woods. Kateri believed that their safe voyage was a special sign of the Providence of God for her. Her journey was a continual prayer and the joy which she felt in approaching Montreal cannot be put into words.

Thus this twenty-one year old Indian maiden found herself far from her own country and free to give herself entirely to God, leaving the future in His hands. She arrived in the autumn of 1677, having made a safe journey.

When she arrived she gave the priests, Fathers Frémin and Choleneq, the letters which Father James de Lamberville had written. The letter read "I send you a treasure, guard it well." Her face, however, told more than the letters. It is impossible to portray the joy she experienced in being in the land of the sunshine, freed from the anxiety she had felt at not being able to serve God as she wished, in being released from the persecution she had endured in the lodge in her own country, in having holy companions and in being able to hear several Masses a day, and above all in being able to receive Holy Communion frequently.

St. ISAAC JOGUES  
(C. Langlois, S.J.)



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