

OUR HEROINE

THE LIFE OF KATERI TEKAKWITHA

by

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CHAPTER VI

HER SPIRIT OF PRAYER



Kateri's one thought was to find out what was most agreeable to God. She considered the contrast between the life that one led in her old village and the one at the Sault and feared to fall into the sins of her people. This disposition gave her more courage to continue in the practices she so ardently desired to undertake. She turned more and more to prayer and sacrifice and could often be seen, rosary in hand, going about her daily tasks, carrying wood or doing menial tasks around the lodge.

Much of her time was spent with her instructress, Anastasia, who was a devout Christian. The subject of their conversation often centered on the life and habits of good Christians.

Kateri saw the will of God in all the events of her life. 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 thought she was dead. Regaining consciousness she said, "My Jesus, I thank Thee for having preserved me from this accident."

Her custom was to go to church at four o'clock in the morning, winter and summer. In winter, she frequently 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 at Mission Saint-François. She had been exempted from taking the tests which other arrivals and the newly baptized were required to pass before being allowed to receive Holy Communion or before

admission into the Society of the Holy Family.

Being a young Indian 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. Katerine felt that she could give up all these things without seeming peculiar, as the others would only think that she was not seeking a husband. She renounced all the red clothing and ornaments of her people and wore a new and simple blue dress on the days when she received Holy Communion.

As Kateri did all things without vanity and in the spirit of God, she continued the same exercises of devotion in the forest which she had practiced in the village and substituted for those she could not do, some which were suggested to her by the Holy Ghost.

That winter she passed her life as if she were a Religious. In the morning she prayed to God with all the others. This was the custom of those who went to the hunt. After prayers the men ate and went hunting for deer or beaver and did not return to the cabin until evening. While the hunters were eating, Kateri hid herself in order to say a prayer, mental or vocal, or a combination of both. She had erected near a stream, where the people came

to get water, a little shrine consisting of a cross which she made of a tree. There she prayed her Guardian Angel (so she told her companion), to assist at Mass for her and to bring her the graces. When she thought the hunters had left, at about nine o'clock in the morning, she returned to the cabin where the women were. She did what she was told, whether it be to cut wood or make soup, or to perform the ordinary employment of Indian women, that is, the making of collars from deerskin. This she did very skilfully, for she performed all such tasks well. During the work she asked those who knew some hymn of the church to sing it or to tell some life of a saint which they had heard in the sermon on Sunday, and she herself would commence in order to give them a theme. Those around her regarded her as a saintly girl, when they saw her praying with angelic modesty.

While others in the woods thought only of beavers and martens, Kateri thought only of serving God and imitating Our Lord in that poverty which never made her feel that she lacked anything. She was so poor that she had no proper clothing to wear in which to receive the Viaticum, until her companion lent her some. This was the principal reason why some who wished to imitate Kateri did not persevere. They were not enough like her, whose constancy and uniform mode of life they admired — a life which surpassed the comprehension of simple nature. (*To be continued.*)