



He Had Work for Her to Do

II

by Lawrence J. Riley

AFTER the scourge of small-pox had so tragically carried away her parents and her brother, the orphan Kateri was adopted into the family of her uncle. Here the responsibility for all the domestic work was soon laid upon her shoulders. Undoubtedly others took advantage of her mild and gentle disposition, but never could it be said that a word of complaint escaped her lips. Meanwhile, however, being a very pensive child, she pondered deeply upon the mysteries which everywhere confronted her. A sense of wonderment grasped her mind, which remained until the end of her life — wonderment about the beauty and variety of nature, the twinkling stars on a cold, clear night, the riot of color in the Autumn forests, the order amid the constant changing of the seasons. But most of all, wonderment about the Power which brought all this about. Hers was a wonderment like that about which Alfred Tennyson would write two centuries later :

*Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies ;
Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower — but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all
I should know what God and man is.*

Her biographers tell us that Kateri was a deeply reflective person. And so, she could not but turn over in her mind the marked contrast between the cruelties wreaked on the prisoners of war and the kindliness of the Christian women — captives like her own mother had been, who treated her as if she were their own. Naturally her little heart was drawn to them, and she could not fail to realize that they were animated by a spirit wholly different from that of others in the village. From their communing with God she could understand that they possessed a peace of conscience and an inner tranquillity that literally were not of this world. All this did the little child see, and as her little mind reflected on it day after day, deep down in her soul she began to hear the gentle whispers of the voice of conscience, whispers which she soon recognized as the call of Him to Whom the Christians prayed.

Kateri was only ten when once again she witnessed the destruction of her village — this time not by plague, but by battle. Saddened though she was at the defeat of her people, it was to prove a blessing in disguise for the little Indian girl. Once peace was restored, missionaries came to preach the work of God. How eagerly she watched the black-robed priests as they labored tirelessly among her people. How deeply impressed upon her mind was the awful gulf between the superstition and idolatry and moral degradation of her pagan acquaintances on the one hand, and the profound faith, the fervent devotion and the exemplary conduct of those who had embraced the black-robes' way of life on the other.

A saint of our own times, St. Teresa of Lisieux, has written : "There is no living in love without some pain or sorrow. Whosoever is not ready to suffer all things, and to stand resigned to the will of his Beloved, is not worthy to be called a lover." And now, the love for God that was growing in the heart of Kateri was to be tested. As a result of her refusal to accept the decision of her guardians that she enter marriage, the household became embittered against her. She was subjected to every form of petty persecution because of her unwillingness to act in accord with a tribal custom that was considered sacred. Tasks far beyond her strength were assigned to her, and she was often berated with cutting words of criticism. Yet she bore these injustices with patience and resignation ; perhaps she rejoiced in her suffering — for did it not make her in some way like unto