



André S. de Groot

"One of them, sometimes Kateri, gave a little talk..."

ill and the poor. Discretely, in the early evening, they carried them firewood and made off so as not to be seen.

This charity for the ailing was much appreciated, for smallpox made the rounds of the village at the outset of autumn. Kateri, who had contracted the disease as a little girl, was now immune to it. Fortunately, to the surprise of all, there were very few deaths at the Mission, whereas there were hundreds of them in the Iroquois Cantons. The newly converted Christians found out, once and for all, that Faith and Baptism do not cause death. Kateri and the members of her little band had known this all along.

After the outbreak of smallpox had quieted down, as the season was drawing to a close, in nearly all the longhouses, men and women were preparing to leave for the winter hunt. During the previous year, because of her first Communion on Christmas Day, Kateri had not departed from the village before the feast of the Epiphany. In 1678, at the end of autumn as the hunters and their wives made off into the woods, Kateri was urged to follow them. There were many excellent reasons for doing so. Life was more relaxed in the woods; food was generally plentiful, whereas in the longhouses it was not. And there was also a greater variety of it. None the less, Kateri decided to stay at home.

Father Cholenec was aware of her decision; he knew that she did not want to spend the winter in the woods, because she was deprived there of the spiritual assistance given by the Fathers and, also, because she had not forgotten the embroglio into which her charity had led her during the previous winter.

The missionary felt, however, that the change of air and of nourishment would be better for her health. He sent for her and advised her to follow her relatives who were going to hunt.

In the face of her determination, the Jesuit did not insist and she remained at the village during the entire winter, "finding what she so eagerly sought, that is, crosses for sustenance, and all the sweetness of heaven for her spirit."

Meanwhile Kateri made the most of Marie Therese Tegaiguenta's company. The latter found much to admire and imitate in the life of her friend. Together they continued their ordinary devotions. Kateri did more. She carefully prepared herself for the reception of the sacraments by long prayer vigils, fasting, and other austerities, which she practised secretly without any other witness than Marie Therese, who followed her as best she could.