

THE MOST AUTHENTIC MOHAWK

(Continued.)



AS the maize birds with a splotch of red on their wing coverts disappeared towards the south during the first days of autumn, Kateri's health improved somewhat. During the summer, whenever she left the longhouse, she always shielded her head with a blanket. Now that the days were cooler, Anastasia no longer pestered her with questions: "Why do you cover your head? Aren't you making yourself ill? Don't you realize that none of the other girls do so?" Kateri generally answered that her friends would think her vain if she went about with her head uncovered. There was another reason to which she did not allude. She needed to protect her impaired eyesight from the glare of the sun. Father Chauchetière thought she did out of virtue what she had to do from necessity.

No matter how much Kateri tried to remain hided, with or without a blanket, people, even the French from Laprairie, began to notice her, for, in her own surroundings, she led the life of a religious although she was of the laity.

After her death, Father Cholenec referred to her as "the guardian angel of the Mission, our powerful protectress and patroness." She was already all this during her lifetime. During 1679, 350 persons were baptized in the little mission church and, no doubt, her prayers played a significant role in bringing her compatriots to the faith. Most benefitted from her holiness and it is not unreasonable to suppose that they often found the courage to do what was right through her loving intercession.

Kateri felt particularly indebted to Hot Ashes, who had so successfully organized her escape from the Mohawk Valley. She certainly remembered him in her prayers and profited from his. Four months after his conversion in 1677, probably before his trip to Gandaouagué, in difficult circumstances, he showed good judgment and great moral fortitude. On the upper end of the Island of Montreal, he met several non-Christian Oneidas, whom a Frenchman had welcomed to his house. As Hot Ashes had been their chief in the Iroquois Cantons they received him cordially and spoke of a good drink, no doubt in his honor. Their irresponsible host, more eager than they to quench their thirst, set down a kettle full of brandy in their midst and refilled it as soon as it was empty. They smoked, chatted and drank from this seemingly perpetual fountain of youth.

Hot Ashes' compatriots invited him to partake of the liquor with them and he did, but moderately, only a few mouthfuls in all. Had he not done this, he would have offended the entire group, for among the Iroquois the greatest deference must be shown to the elderly. Having satisfied the demands of native etiquette, Hot Ashes, who had no intention of offending God, decided not to imbibe any more firewater. Better still, he must prevent the others from doing so. The question was how to proceed in this ticklish situation. His active brain quickly devised a clever stratagem. He arose and, playing the role of a partially intoxicated man, sang danced and pranced. As he gyrated round the tempting caldron, taking a false step, he adroitly kicked it, apparently by accident, and spilt the brandy on the floor. The men roared with laughter at his awkwardness and, since the night was already well advanced, they went to bed, something extremely rare, when once they had begun drinking.

Two years after Kateri's death, Hot Ashes nearly lost his beloved wife Garhio in childbirth. She came to labor in the fields. Complications followed and her friends did their best to help her, but to no avail. Even a Frenchwoman, a midwife of sorts, tried to deliver her and was no more successful than the others. One of Garhio's companions had inherited Kateri's blanket. The next morning, before leaving for early Mass, she lent it to her and encouraged her to ask her departed friend to intercede for her. Alone in the longhouse, the suffering woman threw the blanket over herself and implored Kateri to take care of her. She was instantly cured.

In 1678, Hot Ashes was elected fourth chief of the Christian village, and, in March 1682, he took over the government of the entire population. He was noted for his charity to the poor,