

ANNE THERESA

AN ELDER SISTER OF CATHERINE TEKAKWITHA:
HER PREDECESSOR IN SANCTITY.

In the Fall of 1637, about mid-October, the last boat of the season was sailing back to France from Quebec... By a rare exception, the Ship had on board, among other passengers, four Indian girls and a boy,---all listed in due form as passengers under the care of a dependable person as chaperon.

One of the girls was quite grown up; she was an Iroquois. The three others were young and small: they belonged to the Montagnais, as also did the boy who was a mere child.

The Iroquois maid alone shall be made the subject of the following narrative.

By what hazard, or under what guiding star, was that Iroquois maid led to so far a place from her own country as Quebec? If alone, how could she fumble her way through forests, lakes and rivers, to have at the end, her lot cast with the French...?

There was at that epoch absolutely no intercourse either social or commercial, existing between the latter and the Iroquois; the only casual contact was that effected at the point of offensive arms on the one part and defensive on the other, due to the supreme antagonism with which the warring Iroquois were animated against the French as against all their Indian allies. In all events, the girl must have been a war captive captured in some encounter of her own people with some Huron or Algonquin party, in which her folk happened to be defeated and so badly beaten that all members of her family perished, except

perhaps, herself, who was then captured by the victorious party, who afterward brought her to Quebec, and placed her under the care of the French.

In fact such is the way our heroine reached Quebec -- brought by an Algonquin war chief named Makeabitichiu who relinquished her into the hands of the French: as it appears from a Relation of the time.

In France, this young Iroquois was adopted by a lady of rank-- Madame de Combalot. This lady kept her in her Manor, a certain length of time, instructing her, herself, or having someone else do so.

The French language was what first constituted the substance of the teaching given her... According as she progressed in the knowledge of the language, notions on the Catholic religion were imparted her.

With lessons of Christian Doctrine, she was soon initiated into the domain of supernatural realities, wherein flourish virtues and sanctity.

Madame de Combalot was really a mother to the Indian girl, bestowing on her all the kind attentions, usually accorded to protégées. What a happy lot for a girl of her condition, with no social status whatever, who could have been so easily reduced to the last degree of misery on earth!

Yet, all the cares and attentions of her good Mistress towards her, were nothing, compared with the attentions and interest Heaven seemed to take on her. In her part, the young Indian maiden proved a choice soul, by her seemingly innate dispositions for spirituality, and the virtues it implies. She was, by her ready correspondance to heavenly inspiration, attracting Divine Grace, and God was always ready to lavish upon her new favors.

In His predilection for His chosen one , Heaven seemed to desire that she be placed even on earth as near Heaven as possible. So it was not without a certain design of Divine Providence that Madame de Combalot selected for her protégée a Carmelite convent, wherein to place her under the immediate care and vigilance of such deeply religious women as those...

Thus was this chosen one kindly and honorably treated by good people on earth, and no less well attended by Heaven, as has appeared all along...let us see now how she corresponded to those favours by a most worthy conduct in life, terminated by a most saintly death.

HER VIRTUES

The account of our heroine's life and death has been sent to the Superior of the Jesuits at Quebec, by the Prioress of the convent, where she lived the last period of her short existence, and where she died, in the summer of 1640.

"We have always noticed," says the Prioress, "in Ann-Thérèse (name given her at her Baptism in France) a great eagerness for religious instruction. She was never tired of hearing of God, or of praying to Him, especially on Sundays and holy-days. When, on her request, she was allowed on those days to go out for a walk, her outing consisted in passing from one church to another, to attend different religious services. Her purity and delicacy of conscience were such as to command admiration, and her love for the reception of the Sacraments was remarkable.

On the eve of a feast, when the church was being decorated, she inquired about that particular feast-day, and she was not satisfied until the whole mystery of the day was made plain to her mind; taking a visible interest the whole time the lesson on the subject lasted.

Intimate communication with God by spiritual colloquies were by no means unknown to her. One day she noticed a certain convent girl, who, on reaching her seat after having been to Holy Communion, took immediately to vocal prayer by reading her Prayer-Book, without giving any moment to interior recollection...After church, our Iroquis maid greeted the convent girl by saying: "My dear, having just received the Sacred Body and Blood of Christ, should we not first of all contemplate Our Lord present in our hearts without speaking a word? Should we not adore Him in silence? Should we not say from the bottom of our hearts: My God, I give myself to Thee. Take my heart and be the unique owner of Thy poor creature. Then after talking to Him in the language of the ^{heart} a few moment, we may use the ~~the~~ language of the mouth.

No wonder, then, that Anne-thérèse-(our Heroine)--with a heart in her breast so replated with religious sentiments, was so exceptionally inclined to fraternal charity and gratitude.

In her tenderness toward the poor, beggars were welcome at any time they happened to present themselves at the house, and served without delay...She would interrupt her own dinner, were they to come at such a time, and restrict herself to bread alone in consequence of such ministration. As for her gratitude, although unaccustomed through lack from early age, of all education in civility, she knew how to express her thanks to any person ^{who} would happen to do her some kindness or render her the least service... The nuns and the Fathers had a substantial part in the remembrance of her grateful soul.

One day, in presence of visitors in the parlor, who had asked to see her, she gave an occasion for amusement by certain words which she had mispronounced on account of her lack of familiarity with the French language, thereupon she swiftly quitted the company

in confusion; but recovering her better sens, she returned immediately, and throwing herself on her knees asked pardon for her ill humour and lack of humility.

One day, in presence of a man giving way to impatience on account of an accidental injury received at work, she remonstrated: "It is possible that a christian could suffer his trial with impatience while so beautiful a prize in Heaven is promised him ~~as~~ payment for suffering it with resignation,

As for her, she had many a time an occasion to show her patience, and practice it, as shall afterward be noted in referring to her last sickness which was long and painfull. She felt contenment in her sufferings, thinking often of the sufferings which Jesus endured during his Passion, and especially while nailed ~~nailed~~ to the Cross.

It must have been under a similar impulse that, after her baptism, she took so resolutely to fasting the whole Lent; to that effect she devoted her whole energy to refraining that natural impulse, fortified by an unchecked habit among people of her race, of reaching for food, whenever they felt like eating. During such a season, if, sometimes, she was offered, whether at home or elsewhere, delicacies, she was constant in maintaining an attitude of non-acceptance...

Her modesty and exterior reserve were very remarkable, being exemplified occasionally in her person, by spontaneous acts, such as seldom seen even in lives of Saints ... One day, a gentleman, whom she knew to be honest and whom she had previously seen, at Madame de Cambalot's,

happened to come from the fields, as she saw him advancing toward her, just to greet her, she quickly rec'ded saying; "Jesus! A man! I can't afford to greet a man..."

She would entertain no man, ^{alone} whether religious or lay... Whenever such called on her, she immediately looked about in quest of a lay-sister or other good woman to accompany her.

As mention was once made to her, of the deaign formed in New-France of calling her back and wedding her to some good young Indian, she told the person mentionig it that wanted no other spouse than Christ... In another instance, while in company of some young ladies, the same topic arising during the conversation,, she wirhdrew from the company, thus manifesting her displeasure, and could not be induced to come back unless promise were made never to speak of marriage to her.

Our Heroine's Death

Anne-Thérèse (our Heroine) had already been confined to bed for quite a while... As the sickness progressed, the patient also realized more and more the seriousness of her condition... Under the feeling of her approaching end, it was most inspiring to see that Native of the woods, a daughter of the most indomitable Indian race known in America, go on her knees, and beg of the Nuns, pardon for all the faults and offences she might have been guilty of in their regard. She did it with joined hands, and in a tone of voice expressing most genuine sincerity and with an accent of profound humility...

At first the aspect of death produced a certain apprehension and disturbance in her habitually peaceful soul; but, on asking whether the Blessed Virgin Mary had ever died, ^{and} Being told that she also had to pass by the common law, all repugnance ceased giving place to contentment. Henceforth all thought of death had no longer any power to cause her the least regret.

In her extreme weakness, this surprisingly pious girl whispered into the ear of a Lay-Sister whom she bade approach: "Dear Sister, you know not what contentment is mine", therein..showing her heart.. "I am glad more than I can tell." At her request the Litanies of the B. V. Mary were recited. The attendants noticing her painful effort in answering all the invocations, advised her to spare herself that fatigue, considering the weakness of her body; but she would not suffer any relaxation in her devotional acts through consideration for her crumbling body while her soul stood on the verge of eternity.. She kept on answering with the same effort to the end of the Litanies.

Drawing nearer her end, one good Sister assisted her to say the act of Contrition; at the conclusion of which the dying girl insisted on reciting it again saying: "Encore! encore"! and after a second recitation, she wanted to recite it a third time, which she did.

During the remaining interval the saintly girl had no hearing but for holy things. So, in compliance with her desire, two pious women kept speaking to her of God until she breathed her last, and permitted her soul to take like a white dove free from the hunter's net its soaring flight towards its eternal habitation in Heaven.

J. Adhémar Chappelaine S.J. (Signed) J. A. C. S. J.