

A Pioneer Woman's Songs and Proverbs

Lester Nicholas Recktenwald

THE WRITER'S MOTHER, Anna Katherine Delsing Recktenwald, was born in 1859 at Puy in the province of Limburg in The Netherlands. She emigrated to America with her parents, Franz and Maria Delsing, in 1863, going directly to Carver in the Minnesota River Valley. She had a special gift for poetry, for singing, and for reciting epigrams that fitted almost any occasion. One of her favorite songs has been translated by the writer as follows:

THE EMIGRANT SONG

At last the awaited hour has come
When we must leave our native home.
Before the door, the wagon stands
With sacks and packs for distant lands.

*O! How many wond'rous things
Are there in America.
There we all will wend our way
To beautiful America.*

At last we come to Bremen town;
Its name, my brothers, bespeaks renown.
Let not the ocean you appall;
The loving God rules over all.

At last we come to Baltimore,
Raise up our hands at the sight of shore.
And shout with joy, "Victoria";
We now are in America.

We go into the town to dine
And drink a bit from a flask of wine.
Let us then be joyful and be free
From ties that bind to the old country.

One never quite knew in which of three languages, German, Dutch, or English, Mother would recite the bits of poetry and wisdom she had acquired. Rising songs might greet the late sleeper. In German she would call:

Arise! Arise! Ye sons of toil;
Too long have ye lain there sleeping.

Or she might recite the following verse in Dutch:

Awaken, Jan,
The *pap* is done.¹
Yes, mother,
Already I have
One stocking on.

On other occasions she would use the familiar English:

Are you sleeping,
Are you sleeping,
Brother James?

Other snatches which might occur at any time of the day as the occasion required are illustrated by these little verses:

Little man! Little man!
Ponder, if you can,
What will you be
When you're a man?

Years add on us by the score,
Yet learn we always more and more.

When walls begin to darken,
It is then that sluggards hearken.

¹ A Dutch food served at breakfast.

Here is a story Mother told. It seems that near the village in Holland where she spent her early childhood, there was a wayside shrine of St. Rose. The young swains of the village were wont to take their ladies walking to see the shrine. The pastor of the local church on one occasion remarked that young men went there,

Not to see the saintly Rose,
But fair Rose who with him goes.

About the person with large ideas and little means to carry them out, Mother would say:

Head of great proportion;
Pocketbook in great distortion.

Philosophical by nature, Mother had one law of action that may be tersely stated thus: "If 'it' turns out this way, it will be well; if 'it' turns out the other way, it will be all right too." Some have called this rule the law of compensation on the theory that the alternative result is as satisfying as the result originally planned.



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