

KAREN - "A FORSAKEN LITTLE GIRL"

What might be told about the many of our countrymen who have emigrated from little Denmark and scattered throughout the world would not always make pleasant listening. Our common mother has not always rejoiced because of the children who have left her shores. Many a son and daughter have strayed so far that their heritage has been totally forgotten. On the other hand, there have been many who have carried the best of Denmark's culture with them.

Of those who immigrated to America, Wm. J. Knudsen is no doubt one of the most noted. Another, whose life and work came to a close in America, is Jacob A. Riis. His name stands out in many minds because of the numerous bibliographical descriptions of him and because of his own writings. We who in later years came to live in the United States and Canada were soon made aware of other names which had gained renown in the new nation beyond our own circles: Christian Bay, G.B. Christiansen and Professor Vig to mention just a few.

Leaving home for many of these most successful immigrants was considered pure folly by their elders. Professor Vig relates that when he left for America his aged grandmother said, "I would rather see you in the cemetery, Peter, then see you go so far from home."

Besides these well-known persons there are many whose life and work have made their influence left in the New World in a more quiet and ordinary way. These too have brought joy and blessing to others, honor to their native land, and glory to God.

Permit me to call to your attention one of these, Karen Henriksen, who seventy-five years ago, in 1867, left her native village in Vendsyssel. When only twenty-one, she was on her way to the United States of America. Let me briefly tell you what I have read and heard about her.

Let us first pay a short visit to a home in the town of Underwood, Iowa. It is early summer, in 1925. In one of the rooms of this home in a cozy Danish atmosphere we find an old and slightly hard of hearing lady. She is none the less quite "lively" and in obvious possession of her mental faculties. Her daily edification includes devout reading of her Danish Bible, N.P. Madsen's Devotional and her Danish hymn book. Her whole existence bears witness to a "beautiful golden sunset" characterized by seeming peace and rest in God.

Karen Henriksen, for it is she whom we visited that day, was the widow of Laurits Kr. Bondo (d. 1907) and the mother of a large and successful family in America. She was born to Hans and Kirsten Henriksen on a small farm in Aerso, Dronningslund parish. Karen was the third of six children, one son and five daughters. Only four of the children reached maturity; Andreas, the son, and the three daughters of who Karen was the oldest.

The activities of the Mormon missionaries made a great impression on her as a child. These zealots made great inroads in the large parish making many converts. Karen's father was opposed to the Mormon teaching, but her mother was greatly influenced by it.

When Karen's father died in 1859, Kirsten Henriksen was baptized a Mormon. A few years later she went to the United States with the 565 "Scandinavian Saints" of the "18th Immigrant Association" which according to Mormon sources left Copenhagen on May 9, 1861.

Kirsten took with her the two youngest girls, Andreas and Karen, influenced by their father's position regarding Mormonism, refused to join their mother and the LDS group. It is interesting to note that they made this decision considering their young age.

Andreas was old enough to support himself, but Karen was just at the age of confirmation. She had good reason to be discontented, having been left without father or mother. Professor Vig relates, "Old as Karen Bondo now is, her lips quiver when she thinks about those days and she often says to herself, "I refused to go with them, but I often cried when I thought about how they left me behind."

Karen was able to get work taking care of children in the city of Aalberg. There she was confirmed in Budolphi Church by the dean of the cathedral, Hans Egede Glahn. Later she was employed by Gregor Acthon, who had a large farm in her home village of Aerso. This family was good to her and took an active interest in the "forsaken child", comforting her in her loneliness. In this home Karen remained until she left for the United States in 1867.

When Gregor Acthon sold his farm, with the intention of immigrating to America, Karen expressed her desire to go along. Like so many before her, Karen found it quite natural to desire to go to the new land to seek her future home. Prior to this time, Andreas, her brother, had gone to the United States to find his mother and sisters. He hoped to win them back from Mormonism, but when he arrived in Utah, he found himself attracted by the LDS group. He was won over and decided to remain in Utah.

After arriving in the United States the trip was continued across half the continent to Council Bluffs, Iowa. Here Karen met for the first time, the man who was to become her husband, Laurits Christian Bondo, a pastor's son from Vallensbaeck, Sjaelland, Denmark.

Karen and Laurits were employed on the same farm in Pottawattamie County. Pedersen, the wealthy owner, had been a gold miner in California.

When Laurits first saw Karen it was as if "someone had hit him on the forehead with a mallet." Pity poor Laurits if his love had been spurned. But he won Karen and the following year they were married on May 5, 1868. These two young people, who together made their home in the new land, supplemented one another ideally. As one of their sons later said, "father was so wise and mother was so good."

For the first year or two they continued to work for Pedersen. Then Laurits took a homestead and began to clear the woods and develop the land. From some of the trees a simple block house was constructed and a few bits of furniture were made. Trees were also cut to be hauled to Council Bluffs, where they might bring a little cash. One of the older sons related, "Father told me that when he chopped wood and delivered it to Council Bluffs, he got \$1.75 per cord. He took

his lunch with him from home as well as feed for the horses. There was no extra money for a cup of coffee or even a little candy for the children at home.

Money was needed badly for the taxes, which had to be paid to avoid losing the farm. One year things looked especially bad and Laurits had to sell some of his cows to make the payment. When he used to tell about that, Laurits added, "I could see that if this was to continue I would soon be through farming as well as supporting my family."

At Christmas time, in 1871, the Bondo family had their first Christmas tree - one chopped off a limb. It got so cold on Christmas night, they had to go to bed and look at the Christmas candles.

Although the beginning was difficult and the hardships many, "the plow was kept in the furrow," so to speak. One piece of land after the other was added to the farm and the number of cattle increased. With diligent and well directed work great material prosperity was attained.

By this time, the "forsaken little girl" by virtue of the "guiding hand of God," had become a housewife in a large and wealthy farmhouse in America. She had a fine large family, ten children in all - five sons and five daughters, for whom she was a good and self-sacrificing mother.

The children learned early to work and to help with many chores, both inside and out of doors. Under the guiding hand of Laurits Bondo, there was organization and efficiency in the household and on the farm. Everything ran smoothly in the everyday life of this family. A diary was kept of daily events, as well as a log of the work, accomplishments and a close account of income and expense.

Although Laurits was a pastor's son he seemed to have been cut out to be a farmer. He learned many basic things about agriculture at Enslevgaard in Denmark so that his knowledge of the soil and its care was not insignificant when he arrived in the United States. "One day when I came home from school," one of his sons relates, "my eyes really grew big, when I saw 26 steers hitched to a draining apparatus, which was being driven forward about six feet in the ground. The resulting ditch permitted water to run off the sour, water sick soil, transforming it into good and fertile agricultural land."

Homelife was certainly not neglected. The children fondly recall, and treasure deeply the memories of the long and cozy winter evenings in their childhood. Their father entertained them by reading aloud Danish literature such as Ingemen's novels, Hans Christian Andersen's Fairy Tales and selections from Aschenflet-Hansen's To My Little Friends. Mrs. Bondo kept the spinning wheel in motion as an accompaniment to the family's activities. Usually the evening closed with the singing of a hymn. Such was the atmosphere, one of peace and coziness, in the "forsaken little girl's home."

Permit me at this point to include an unusual incident which happened in the early 1880's when a typhus epidemic threatened the home. The family doctor announced that if a new house was not built there might be many new graves. Thus hurried preparations were made for the building of a new home. Boards and nails were brought to the new site. On the day when the newly cleared brush on the location was to be burned the fire got out of hand, and threatened the barn where all the new lumber was stored. Laurits Bondo knelt down in the open and asked God for help. His prayer was answered for the wind turned, and barn and lumber were saved. The fire came so close that the boards on that side of the barn bear marks to this day from the flames. It was indeed a gracious experience.

Three of Laurits and Karen Bondo's sons chose to study theology and all three became pastors. It is not too common that a Danish farmer makes such a contribution to the staff of pastors which serve the mother church's synod in the United States. But it must not be forgotten that in the Bondo family there have been any pastors. As already mentioned Laurits' father (d. 1887) was pastor in Vallensbæk. Two of his brothers were also pastors; Vilhelm, Provst in Skelksor (d. 1919) and Juul, Dean of the Cathedral of Roskilde (d. 1915).

If the supposition is true that Bondo, Bonde and Bunde represent the same family we find that there were pastors in the family as early as the reign of Christian II. In an old document from the beginning of the 16th century, a chancery record from the time of Frederick I, we note certain appointments of pastors in the diocese of Odense. Among these appointments, we note that of Hr. Peter Bunde to St. Nicolai Church in Svendborg.

When Karen Bondo reached the age of 65, she had the opportunity to visit Utah to see those members of her family who were still alive. Her mother and one of her sisters had already died, but the other sisters and Andreas were still living. It was a thrilling experience for them to meet after almost 50 years of separation. Karen received from her sister, on this trip, an old Bible as an inheritance and memento from her deceased mother. After Karen Bondo's death it was decided that if anyone in the family became a pastor, the one who was first to be ordained, should inherit the Bible. The book accordingly is in the possession of Pastor Ervin Bondo, Oregon, Wisconsin (now Racine, Wisconsin).

On her last birthday, July 19, 1925, Karen Bondo had the joy of having with her - her children, her grandchildren and other relatives - 98 in all. In the same year, on August 18, she suffered a stroke. She asked for the Holy Communion, which she received from the hands of her son, V.W. Bondo. She lived until Sunday, August 30, and while her three pastor sons were in the pulpits, Karen Bondo closed her eyes in death. Her body was buried next to that of her husband in St. Paul's Cemetery, Boomer Township, Neola, Iowa.

Karen never saw Denmark again, but her faithful love for the country and people remained constant. This love for Denmark and its traditions has become the heritage of her children. Blessed be her memory.

I will close this narrative by telling a little about Karen's faithful husband.

One day near the end of his life Laurits was out on a rather long ride with one of his sons. The conversation turned to the subject of his premonition that his death was approaching and to the last things which should be done. He said among other things, "I have been thinking, that in as much as God has been good to me during my whole lifetime, I would like to give a sum of money to some good cause." The son suggested the church school in Blair, Nebraska. (Dana College)

On November 4, 1907, not long after this ride, Laurits Bondo died at the age of 61 years. He had not left a will, but freely left it to the children to handle the estate. His wish to give a sum of money to the school was made known and fulfilled. A professor's residence was erected bearing the name "Bondo Memorial."

Laurits Bondo was a man of peace, firm and upright in character. He was an intelligent man whose ability proved a great help to many who knew him. Both his memory and the memory of his wife, Karen, are held in highest honor and love by their children.

The pioneer home of Laurits Christian Bondo and Karen Bondo will continue to live in the history of the Danish Pioneers. It will also occupy a significant place in the history of the United Church in America. All to the glory of God.

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