

NORTHERN NEWS

Greenland today

While in summing up the average person's knowledge of Denmark one might list many things, it is probable that most of them would be associated with the idea of a small, flat country, with pleasant scenery and a congenial climate, whose inhabitants live by farming and brewing. Yet it is a fact that 98 per cent of the territory is one of the wildest and most desolate mountain regions in the world with glaciers nearly half the size of western Europe. For Greenland forms an integral part of the Danish kingdom, and its area of 780,000 square miles is about fifty times that of the rest of Denmark put together. If it makes a smaller impression in the minds of most people, that is because it is inhabited by only about 25,000 persons, or approximately 0.5 per cent of the total population of Denmark.

Greenland is the largest island in the world, measuring from south to north more than 1,500 miles, but five-sixths of the area is covered by the vast ice-cap, which has a thickness of up to 10,000 feet. Only a narrow coastal fringe is ice-free, and even there arctic conditions prevail and forests are non-existent. The ice-free area is a mountainous region intersected by great fiords and reaching a height, in Gunnbjørns Fjeld, of 12,400 feet, the highest point inside the Arctic Circle. Glaciers coming from the ice-cap at many points pack the deep fiords with gigantic icebergs. The grandeur of the scenery is scarcely equalled anywhere in the world, and many districts of Greenland undoubtedly offer great opportunities for future tourist travel.

The 25,000 Greenlanders who inhabit the coasts, in particular the southern part of the west coast, are of mixed Eskimo and Scandinavian extraction. The connection between Greenland and Scandinavia goes back a thousand years to

the time of the Vikings, when the great voyages of discovery of these hardy seamen took them across the North Atlantic via Greenland to North America, 500 years before Columbus discovered the Bahamas. The Greenlanders now all belong to the national Lutheran Church of Denmark, and in every respect enjoy equal status with other members of the Danish population.

Politically, Greenland constitutes a part of the Danish democracy. Popularly elected local councils administer local affairs, and two Greenlanders, elected in Greenland, sit in the Folketing, the Danish Parliament. Together with the 177 other members, they legislate in matters affecting the kingdom as a whole, including Greenland.

The economy of Greenland is based primarily on the sea. The land offers few facilities for economic development. Forests, as already mentioned, are non-existent, and farming is restricted to sheep-rearing in a few of the well-sheltered fiords in the extreme south of West Greenland. But the sea has ample resources and it is from there that the population of Greenland, and indeed the populations of all the regions peopled originally by Eskimo, have always got their living. The primitive economy was originally founded on seal-hunting, but the change in world climate, which has taken place during the last generation has forced the Greenlanders to reorganize their economic life as the seal vanished from southern Greenland waters and fish appeared to take its place. Fishing, especially cod-fishing, has undergone a great expansion during the last thirty years. Greenland is now the home of a modern fishing and fish-processing industry competing with the best in the world market.

If the soil of Greenland affords little facility for agriculture and forestry, it

contains minerals, which have proved capable of economic extraction and, it is hoped, will continue to do so in the future. For nearly a hundred years the mineral cryolite, the bulk of which is used in the aluminium industry, has been mined at Ivigtut, in southwest Greenland. This, incidentally, is the only place in the world where it can be economically worked. At Mesters Vig, in northeast Greenland, the mining of zinc and lead was recently started. It is an enterprise that seems to offer the prospect of profitable working, but which in particular is expected to form the basis for future prospecting of a larger area with interesting possibilities of mineral finds. Since the war, an intensive geological survey of the whole of Greenland has been undertaken with such possibilities in view.

Greenland is remarkable for, among other things, the fact that there is no income tax—not yet! But there is other taxation, especially on spirits, tobacco, and various other luxuries. The revenue from these taxes goes to the local councils, which spend the bulk of it on social welfare, especially the care of the aged, invalids, orphans, etc. Social welfare, in other words, is provided by the local inhabitants. On the other hand, the Danish Government has assumed responsibility for the health services. The climate, and the poor housing that still exists in many places have meant that the health conditions in the past have not been good. Tuberculosis, in particular, has always been a scourge. The Danish Government operates some fifteen hospitals in Greenland, staffed by doctors and nurses. Medical care, medicines, and hospitalization are free to the entire population. Recently, a modern sanatorium, Queen Ingrid's Sanatorium at Godthaab, the capital, with 21 beds, was opened, and another major weapon in the war on tuberculosis was also brought into action recently, when the ship *Misigssut* went into operation. This ship is equipped with every means known to science for the detection of tuberculosis. It travels up and down the several thousand miles of coast and has already called

at all the hundreds of small settlements and examined practically every Greenlander. It is hoped to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis by these means, in a relatively short period of time, to the level of the rest of Denmark, which is the lowest in the world. An important associated factor is the drive to raise the housing standard by means of cheap loans, Government grants, and technical assistance in building.

The work of educating the people of Greenland began over two hundred years ago and it is a hundred years since illiteracy was abolished. The system of education has been greatly extended in recent years and it is now possible to pass from schools in Greenland with examinations that are the equivalent of those elsewhere in Denmark. Educational work is greatly hampered by language difficulties, as the bulk of the population speaks only the Eskimo language. A great effort is now being made to make the people bilingual through the teaching of Danish, while education in the speaking and writing of their own language is being intensified as never before.

Altogether, there is at present a great deal of activity in adult education; libraries, evening classes, and study groups have been opened in many places. It is planned to set up a folk high school on the same lines as the famous Danish folk high schools, a project that is expected to yield good results.

The radio, in particular, is an important factor in adult education. The immense size of the country has been something of an obstacle, but with the extension of the broadcasting network, which is expected to reach completion in the spring of 1958, there will be full coverage and it will be possible by this educational medium, so admirably adapted to Greenland conditions, to penetrate to every one of the thousands of widely scattered homes. Incidentally, the Greenland broadcasting stations, which transmit chiefly in the Eskimo language, can be heard by the Eskimo of northern Canada, who speak the same language.

The geographical situation of Greenland has given it increased topicality in

recent years. In the old days when world communications lay across the oceans, Greenland was remote, the northern waters being difficult to navigate owing to the climate and the ice. The rise of inter-continental air travel has basically altered the relative position of Greenland and it is now situated practically midway between Europe and North America where most of the world's economic activity is located. A glance at the globe will show that many of the shortest routes between these two continents lie across Greenland. Greenland will therefore in the future acquire a greatly enhanced importance, which will confront Denmark with problems of assisting air traffic by means of airfields, meteorological stations, and air safety service. Already a large meteorological network has been established, financed chiefly by the International Civil Aviation Organization, and air routes between northern Europe and the west coast of the United States now pass through airports in Greenland.

Greenland's relationship to Denmark in the past was that of a colony, it is only in our own time that it has become an integral part of the kingdom. But it would be wrong to infer that it was ever exploited by Denmark. On the contrary, Denmark always considered its task to be that of assisting the population to achieve the same level of civilization as that of other Danes. In a period that has seen the breaking-up of great colonial empires and the attaining of independence by former colonies, the opposite development has taken place in Greenland: a former colony has been integrated into the kingdom. The policy that has led to this result will also be applied in the future, the ties that bind Greenland and Denmark together being made firmer and closer.

ESKE BRUN

IX International Botanical Congress

The Ninth International Botanical Congress will be held in Montreal, Canada, from August 19 to 29, 1959, at McGill University and the University of Montreal. The program will include

papers and symposia related to all branches of pure and applied botany. A first circular giving information on program, accommodation, excursions, and other detail will be available early in 1958. This circular and subsequent circulars including application forms will be sent only to those who ask to be placed on the Congress mailing list by writing to the Secretary-General:

Dr. C. Frankton
Secretary-General
IX International Botanical Congress
Science Service Building
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada.

The cache at Victoria Harbour

This was established by Captain John Ross on May 28, 1832, just before the *Victory* was abandoned. In a "tunnel", the long and troublesome excavation of which is described in Chapter 48 of his "Narrative"¹, he deposited the following valuable scientific instruments: one 36-inch transit, one 9-inch theodolite, one 3½-inch astronomical telescope, 5 feet 6 inches long, four chronometers, and also some gunpowder.

Unfortunately, he never recorded the whereabouts of the tunnel! Neither did his malcontent steward William Light, in the book he inspired, although his account² stated that the excavation was given the semblance of a grave by placing atop it two human skulls (filched from Eskimo graves at Felix Harbour). I suggest, however, that his account is unreliable, as Captain Ross used the word "tunnel" on three different occasions; the steward probably confused the grave prepared for the man who died while the tunnel was being excavated.

There are, however, two clues to the position of the cache, afforded by illustrations in the "Narrative". Opposite page 608 is a plan of Victory Harbour. This long and narrow, mountain-girt

¹Ross, Sir John. Narrative of a second voyage in search of a northwest passage. . . London, 1835. p. xiii.

²Huish, Robert. The last voyage of Captain John Ross R.N. . . . London, 1835. p. 619.