

DANISH GREENLAND: ITS PEOPLE AND PRODUCTS. BY HENRIK RINK WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY HELGE LARSEN. *Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975. 468 pages, 16 plates, map, index. \$25.00.*

TALES AND TRADITIONS OF THE ES-KIMO. BY HENRIK RINK WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY HELGE LARSEN. *Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975. 472 pages, numerous illustrations drawn and engraved by Eskimo. \$25.00.*

The 250-year Danish administration of Greenland has been ably and faithfully recorded in many contemporary publications. Hans Egede, the missionary-founder, set an example with the publication in 1738 of his annual reports (1721-36)¹, and a work on natural history three years later which was translated into English in 1745². The reports were soon to be continued by Egede's sons Poul and Niels. Another missionary endeavour, too often overlooked nowadays — that of the Moravian Brethren — also provided an early account, not only of the mission itself but also the history of Greenland along with a description of the country and its inhabitants in the mid-eighteenth century³.

This early publishing tradition had a new flowering in the second half of the nineteenth century through the work of two exceptional scholars, both residents of the colony. The one, Samuel Petrus Kleinschmidt, deserves more than the passing reference possible here; the other, his contemporary Henrik Rink, was not only the author of the two works here reviewed, but can also be considered the founding father of modern Greenland.

Rink was initially not a government administrator, but a scientist sent to Greenland to examine possible mining sites. His reputation was made by reports on Disko Bay coal and graphite, but also by studies of the interior ice-cap and of the icebergs parading northward along the west coast. His interests soon broadened to include the welfare of the native people, and the urgent need for reform of the administration if they were to prosper or even survive. In 1852, he served on a royal commission studying Greenland affairs and was then appointed as senior administrator there, charged with giving effect to its recommendations. Searching for an explanation of the catastrophic decline in native population, he became convinced that the immediate reasons — epidemic diseases and near starvation — had been brought on by disruption of the traditional Eskimo system, follow-

ing arrival of the Danish missionary-traders. His solution was to introduce gradually new forms of self-government at the community level through what would now be termed social welfare. This marks the beginning of the enlightened Danish administrative policies which were to continue for the next century. Rink's second major innovation was the introduction, together with Kleinschmidt, of printing and publishing, including reproduction of original illustrations by woodcuts and lithography. This pioneering venture is recalled each time we see a copy of the Greenland newspaper *Atuagagdliutit* that he founded, now in its 117th year of publication.

Rink's books *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimos* and *Danish Greenland* first appeared in English in 1875 and 1877 having been published somewhat earlier in Danish. Reprinted a century later, they retain much of their original impact and serve incidentally as very useful background to the most recent royal commission on Greenland that is now preparing for "home rule" or "devolution" — an entirely logical consequence of Rink's own concept of Greenland.

Danish Greenland provides a detailed geographical description of the country and its people as they were known a century ago, arranged systematically in sixteen chapters. But it is much more. The material on the native Greenlanders records not only their physique, language, customs and origins, but also details of their means of livelihood, housing, and transportation, along with first-hand accounts prepared by individual native authors of hunting experiences, daily life in small and often isolated communities, marriage, religion, traditions, and periods of famine. Rink supplements his main text with appendices on meteorology, antiquities, ice conditions, linguistics, and the fauna and flora. The sixteen plates are all of original drawings by native artists, some of which were circulated first as coloured lithographs.

Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo includes original material gathered by Rink during sixteen winters and twenty summers of travel and residence in West Greenland. While assembling this material, he constantly sought clues in it to the origins of the Greenland Eskimo, and eventually looked to the folk tales of Labrador and westwards as far as Alaska, and also to Siberia. By 1891, he had formulated the theory, published in his *The Eskimo Tribes*⁴, that the original population of Greenland had slowly migrated from Alaska by way of northern Canada, a view now generally accepted. But *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo* is far more than scientific underpinning for a hypothesis of

folk wandering. The one hundred and fifty tales, recorded at a time when folk memory was still dependable, make enthralling reading, and include some literary gems like the little fragment from the stormy coast east of Cape Farewell, entitled "Sunrise". It was later recorded by Knud Rasmussen and published as *The Great Hunter from Aluk*⁵.

McGill-Queen's University Press deserves our thanks for reissuing, after the lapse of a century, these two facsimile volumes, complete with all the illustrations and an 1866 map of Danish Greenland based on an original by Samuel Kleinschmidt.

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WILLIAM SCORESBY, ARCTIC SCIENTIST. BY TOM AND CORDELIA STAMP. *Whitby, Yorkshire: Caedmon of Whitby Press, 1976. 253 pages, 16 figures. £3.50.*

This is a well-written biography of William Scoresby, a key figure in the history of Arctic science and whaling. Upon his death in 1857, Scoresby's records and correspondence were deposited with the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society, but only now has this "immense pile of paper" been systematically sorted — by Tom and Cordelia Stamp. They have skilfully and unobtrusively merged quotations from Scoresby with their own explanatory text.

Scoresby's life on the sea began with a summer voyage on his father's whaling ship in 1800, when he was only ten years old. Three years later he became an apprentice, and at sixteen, when already a chief mate, he reached with his father a latitude of 81° 30' — at that time the farthest any sailing vessel had ventured north. At twenty-one he was captain of his own ship.

In 1808, Scoresby was elected to membership in the Wernerian Natural History Society, and in 1819, he became a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. His reputation

rests solidly upon his two-volume *Account of the Arctic Regions*, first published in 1820, after he had spent sixteen summers with whaling ships in Arctic waters. This book has been described as "the foundation stone of Arctic science" and "one of the most remarkable books in the English language". Eighty years later General A. W. Greely said: "Geographically, Scoresby's discoveries were greater in importance and number than those of any other single navigator in Greenland waters". Scoresby in his book reviewed thoroughly the Arctic and whaling literature of many languages, and made original observations of snowflakes, polar ice, ocean currents, meteorology, and the natural history of whales, recognizing for the first time the concentration of whales in the more opaque green waters that contained plankton.

As early as 1815, Robert Jameson, Scoresby's teacher at Edinburgh University, suggested to him that he volunteer to lead an Arctic discovery expedition. In 1817, when he found the east coast of Greenland free of ice, Scoresby wrote to Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, to suggest that the British government finance an expedition led by a whaling captain such as himself. It is, however, overly speculative for the Stamps to claim so assuredly: "Thus began the long and largely ill-organised search for the north-west passage by British naval commanders of little or no Arctic experience, which could have been completely avoided by the appointment and adequate support of Scoresby". The partisanship of the authors is again evident when they call John Barrow, the Secretary of the Navy Board who blocked Scoresby's aspirations to command a major polar expedition, a "mean-spirited sycophant".

The advice given by Scoresby (in his 1820 book) on methods for exploring the northern coast of North America was indeed better than the plans issued by Barrow. Scoresby made the recommendation that small parties should travel on foot with sledges, with or without dog teams, and felt that by a similar method it might even be possible to reach the North Pole over the ice. Scoresby pointed out why the ocean must be frozen at both poles, while Barrow died believing in the existence of open water at the North Pole.

Based as it is on his papers, this book tells us much of the personality of Scoresby and of his life and times. Yet we are told little about the deaths of his parents, and nothing about his brother's successful medical practice in the State of New York. Scoresby seems not to have made contact with his brother on either of his trips to the United States.