

X. *An Abstract of a Natural History of Greenland, by Hans Egedius, intituled, Det gamle Gronlands Beskrivelse, eller Naturet-Historie, af Hans Egede. Kjøbenhavn, 1741. 4<sup>to</sup>. Communicated by John Green, M. D. Secretary of the Gentlemens Society at Spalding.*

*The Title Page is as follows.*

Read Dec. 8.  
1743

**A** Description of old and new *Greenland*, or a Natural History of old *Greenland's* Situation, Air, Habitude, and Circumstances.

The Beginning and End of the old and new *Norwegian* Colonies. The present Inhabitants, their Original, Manners, Living, and Employments.

The Products, as Beasts, Birds, Fish, &c. With a new Chart, and several Copper Plates. By *Hans Egedius*, formerly Missionary in *Greenland*, and now Superintendant and Professor in that Language.

It is dedicated to the Prince Royal of *Denmark*, &c.  
*Imprimatur* Marc Woldike.

C A P. I. *Situation, Climate, and Soil*, to p. 4.

*Greenland* lies about 160 *English* Miles West from *Iceland*, begins at 59 Degrees, 40 Minutes North Latitude.

Its East Side stretches to *Spitzbergen* 78 to 80 Degrees Latitude, and believed to be an Island separate from *Greenland*.

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Its West Side is known to 70 Degrees Latitude. If *Greenland* is an Island, or joined to other Countries, it is not known for a Certainty, but probably joins to *America* on the North-west Side: For between *America* and *Greenland*, stretches the *Fretum*, or Bay, called in the Sea-Charts *Davis's Streights*, which is navigated by them and other Nations on Account of the Whale-fishery, but to the Bottom of this Sound no Ship has ever been.

*Greenland* is an high rocky Country, which is always covered with Ice and Snow, which never thaws except near the Sea. The highest Land can be seen 80 *English* Miles from the Sea. The whole Coast is fortified with large and small Islands. It has several Firths or Rivers, which run a long Way within Land; amongst which is *Baal's River*, where the first *Danish* Colony was fixed in 1721. which runs 80 Miles within Land. That in all Sea-Charts called *Forbisber's-Streight*, also *Baer-Sound*, which are said to make Two large Islands at a Distance from the main Land; but, in Reality, I did not find them so.

CAP. II. *Colonies and Conversion*, to p. 23.

*Greenland* was first discovered by the *Norwegians* and *Icelanders*; and the brave *Raude*, who first discovered it in 982. praised it, and persuaded several of his Countrymen to inhabit it; and at the Instance of *Oluf Tryggesson*, first Christian King in *Norway*, carried a Priest with him, who taught and baptized all the Inhabitants; and from time to time *Greenland* multiplied into new Colonies, many Churches and Abbeys were built, Bishops and other Teachers provided for: But the *Norwegians* were not the first  
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Inhabitants; for they found wild People on the West Side, who without doubt were originally *Americans*. The present Inhabitants probably are a Race of the *Schrellingers*. In 1545. *Dithmar Blefken* reports a Monk, with his Bishop, sailed to *Norway*, lived to 45 Years in *Iceland*: And he reports, that a *Dominican* Cloister was in *Greenland*, called *St. Thomas*. But this is proved false by *Arngrim*.

*Mogens Heirson* was sent to find out *Greenland*, and was obliged to return, because his Ship was stopped (as he imagined) by magnetical Rocks under Water, although the Wind was favourable; but the real Magnets probably was the Current, which is so strong at *Staton Point*, a Ship under full Sail with the fairest Wind sails slow.

In 1721. a Company of Traders was set up in *Bergen*, with a Royal Privilege, when King *Frederic* resolved to begin a Colony at 64 Degrees, wherewith I and my Family went, and continued 15 Years. Our Design was to find the Eastern District, as the best: A *Hollander* affirmed some of their Ships had been there, and found the Land free from Ice in 62 Degrees. This I found to be true in 1736. on passing *Staton*, *Huck*, and *Cape Farewel*, near the Land, then free from Ice on the Coast, which was not usual: But as it is seldom that Ships can come with Safety to the East Side, it is most convenient with small Boats through the Openings near the Main, where the Current setting South-west prevents the Ice from fixing.

CAP. III. *Natural Products*, to p. 27.

In the Bay of *Hope* there are many good Places for feeding of Cattle, with proper Ground for Tillage, and good Water: No Trees, except within the Rivers, only Brush-wood: Juniper-bushes abound here, whose Berries are the Size of the largest Pease. There are divers Plants here, as *Angelica*, *Rosemary*, *Scurvy-grass*; and a Grass with yellow Flowers, whose Root smells like Roses in the Spring.

In 60 and 65 Degrees, the Country is best, and *Barley* will ripen there: *Turneps* and *Colwort* grow well; especially the first, which are large, and of a sweet Taste.

There are Rocks which produce *Verdegrise*, as also *Sulphur* or *Brimstone*, *Marcasite*; and I found on an Island one of a yellow brown Sand, having *Cinnabarine* red Veins. There are whole Mountains of the *Asbestos*. There is found a grey Stone, or Bastard Marble, of different Colours. The Sea produces several sorts of *Conchs* and *Mussels*, also divers sorts of *Corallines*.

CAP. IV. *Air and Weather*, to p. 32.

The Summer here lasts from *May* to *September*: The Cold at 64 Degrees is moderate, but at 68, &c. extreme, and will freeze Brandy.

The Land is constantly covered with Ice and Snow, except near the Sea, and in the Rivers. Although the Summer oft-times is warm in *Greenland*, it seldom or never thunders, &c. The *Aurora Borealis* is so strong here towards New Moon in clear Weather, as you may read by it.

CAP. V. *Beasts and Birds, Hunting and Fowling,*  
to p. 36.

*Greenland* produces *Bears*, which live on the Ice, and are dextrous at catching *Otters, Seals, &c.* *Rain Deer* are in great Plenty. *Hares* are very large, good and white all the Year. There are plenty of *Foxes*. They have *Dogs*, none of which can bark, only howl.

Their Birds are the *Ryper*, or *Wood-Partridge*, *Ravens, Eagles, Falcons, Sparrows, Goldfinches, &c.*

The *Mosquitoes* are very troublesome in *July* and *August*.

CAP. VI. *Fishes and Amphibious Animals, and Fishing; Whales, Narval or Sea-Unicorn, and Sea-Birds,* to p. 55.

The Sea produces *Whales*, the *Fin-fish*, which live on a kind of *Loufe*, brown-coloured, who moves so slow, that he may be taken by Hand. This Creature is oily, and, when rubbed with the Fingers, produces *Train*.

There is another sort of *Whale* in these Seas, called *North-Capers*, which feed on *Herrings*; as also the *Sword-fish*, who is the *Whale's* greatest Enemy; and when he kills one, eats nothing but his Tongue, leaving the rest to the *Shark, Walrofs,* and Birds of Prey. In these Seas are *Cachelots* or *Pot-fish*, a sort of *Whales*, their Length 50 to 70 Feet. The *White-fish* are likewise in these Seas, like a *Whale*, but without Fins on the Back. There is likewise a small *Whale* produced here called *Butts-kops*; as also *Unicorns* of the *Whale* kind, which they call *Narval*:

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Their Horn, as some Authors affirm, are not Teeth, because its Root is not in the Jaws, but goes a long Way into the Head. The *Nifer*, or *Porpoise*, are also in these Seas; as also the *Walrofs*, shaped like a *Seal*, but much larger; his Flesh is like fat Pork: His irreconcilable Enemy is the white *Bear*. There are several Sizes of *Seals*, but of the same Shape, except the *Klap-myfs*, which has a cartilaginous Hood, which covers his Eyes. There are other Fish, as *Sharks*, *Holly-butts*, *Red-fish*, *Trout*, *Salmon*, *Bull-heads*, *Stone-biters*, *Smelts*, *Whitings*, *Herrings*, and a Fish like a *Bream*, with Pricks on its whole Body. There are *Mussels*, and some large ones that produce the Pearl: Here also are *Shrimps*, *Crabs*, &c.

Amongst the Sea-birds are the *Edder*, *Ducks* of Three Kinds; as likewise the *Alker*, and the *Tornauviarsuk*, which has beautiful Feathers, and the Size of a *Lark*: There also are *Geese* here. *Greenland* produces *Maws*, *Redshanks*, *Cormorants*, *Lunders*, *Parrots*, *Sharvers*, *Tersters*, *Angle-tasters*, *Snipes*, &c.

CAP. VII. *Impliments and Utensils*, to p. 63.

The Impliments of the *Greenlanders*, on Shore, are to shoot *Rain-Deer*; and at Sea to catch *Whales*, *Seals*, *Birds*, &c. The Bow is about Six Feet long, of tough *Fir*, which they bind round with *Deer* Sinews: The Point of the Arrow is pointed with Iron or Bone. All the sort of Fish they catch, and cannot eat fresh, they dry against Winter.

The Boats are of Two sorts; one used only by the Men, about Three Fathom in Length, their Breadth about 19 Inches, with an Hole in the Middle, not  
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larger than one Man, close-laced, can thrust himself into; with these Boats they are able to row 72 Miles a Day, using only one Oar.

CAP. VIII. *Manners and Habitations*, to p. 66.

Their Houses are of Two sorts, Winter and Summer: The former are made of Turf and Stone, from Four to Six Feet high, flat-roofed; on one Side are the Windows, made of bleached *Seal-guts*, *Holly-butt Maws*, sown together, and are sufficiently transparent: Their Doors are very low, they creep in on their Hands and Knees. Their Summer-houses are made by raising Poles, which they cover with young *Seal-skins*.

CAP. IX. *Shape, Constitutions and Tempers*, to p. 68.

The Inhabitants of the Northern Parts are troubled with Dysenteries, Bloody-fluxes, &c. They have seldom any contagious Distempers: They use no Medicines; and, instead of Remedies, their Conjurers mumble over their Bodies some strange Jargon. Wounds they sew up; Cataracts on the Eyes they take off as follows: They insert a crooked Needle under the Skin, and with a Knife raise it up, and draw it off safely. When their Children are troubled with Worms, the Mother puts her Tongue up the Fundament, to kill them.

CAP. X. XI. and XII. *Of their Customs, Capacities, Cloathing, Diet, and Cookery*, to p. 77.

CAP. XIII. *Marriages and Education*, to p. 82.

They have riotous Assemblies, in which it is reckoned good Breeding, when a Man lends his Wife to a Friend. None come to these but married People. The Women esteem it a piece of Fortune when they have to do with their Prophet, and the Husbands pay them for the Honour; especially if they prove with Child, their own Endeavours having been fruitless.

The Women, as soon as delivered, go immediately about their usual Work. The Navel-string must not be cut by a Knife, but a *Muscle-shell*, or bit off; when dried, it is used as a Charm. They hold a Piss-pot over the Womens Heads whilst in Labour, thinking it to promote hasty Delivery: They seldom bring Twins, but often Monsters.

CAP. XIV. *Manner of burying their Dead, and preserving their Corpses under Tumuli of Stones.*CAP. XV. *Games, Poetry, Music, and Dancing*, to p. 93.

They have several Diversions amongst them, as Singing, Dancing, in which they challenge one another. They play likewise at Foot-ball: Thus, they say, the deceased Souls play in Heaven with a *Wal-rofs's* Head, which is performed when the *Aurora-Borealis* appears.



CAP. XVI. and XVII. *Language and Vocabulary,*  
to p. 105.

At Page 86. the Author presents his Reader with a *Greenland Ode*, much like *Lapland Poetry*.

Their Language has no Affinity with any known *European* one: Few Words are like the old *Norwegian*. It is difficult of Pronunciation, as most of their Words are Gutturals. It has not the Letters c, d, f, g, x.

CAP. XVIII. and XIX. *Present State of Trade in Greenland, and of Religion there,* to p. 120.

Their Religion consists in nothing more than superstitious Ceremonies.

CAP. XX. *Astronomy,* to p. 125.

The Sun, Moon, Planets, and other Stars, they imagine had their Beginning from their Forefathers, and were formerly People by a singular Manner taken up to Heaven. They are of Opinion, that when the Moon does not appear, or is dark, it is seeking her Sustenance on the Earth: And they say further, that it sometimes comes down, and makes Whores of their Women; for which Reason none dare lie on their Backs, before they spit on their Fingers, and stroke it over their Bellies; and young Girls dare not stare at the Moon, for fear of conceiving by her.

CAP. XXI. *Considerations of the Reverend and Learned Author, for promoting the Success of his Mission, and the Salvation of the Greenlanders,* to the End.