

# SOMETHING HEALTHY IN THE STATE OF DENMARK

WHEN Karl Eskelund, the new Danish Consul-General, and his wife, Lotte, arrived the other day, Mrs. Eskelund told us that it was the first time a Danish representative had been sent to New Zealand officially. The idea, she explained, was part of a scheme to widen Danish diplomatic circles in all the Dominions, and particularly New Zealand, which has a great deal in common with Denmark. "And when I say that," she said, "I don't mean only the cigarette shortage. Our two countries are closely allied economically, and many Danes want to come here."

Mrs. Eskelund was born in Vienna and was on the staff of a newspaper there before Austria was invaded by the Nazis. The editor was sent to concentration camp, but she was able to make her way to Denmark. She now makes a hobby of free-lance journalism, writing for Danish newspapers, and her immediate task is to tell the Danes all about New Zealand. She also gives up a good deal of time to translating English and other books into Danish, for she believes that the English language is extraordinarily rich in expression. The

study of languages vies with her interest in photography, but she confines her camera work to shots of nature. "I never take people," she says.

She hopes to translate into photographs much of the New Zealand landscape, for she is fascinated by the mountains here. That can easily be understood, for the highest mountain in Denmark is only 500 ft.

When we interviewed her, Mrs. Eskelund told us first about the strong preference in Denmark for English literature. Before the war, she said, most of the books published in Denmark were by English authors; though there was a good representation of American writers, English books ruled the market. Most popular were works by Dickens, Shaw, Wells, Walpole, Galsworthy, and Priestley, to name a few. Danish readers liked a certain amount of crime fiction, but they paid a compliment to British and American writers of this type of tale by their expressed opinion that crime stories were hardly worth reading unless by those authors.

## A Ban on Books

As soon as the Germans landed in Denmark they immediately prohibited

publication of certain English books, but allowed literature of a general nature. They insisted that the Danes should also publish German works, and here difficulties arose, for Danes would not read the general run of German books. Still, the Danes complied with the letter, if not the spirit, of the law by publishing perfectly innocuous and innocent pieces of German literature.

"Could you," we asked, "give us some idea of the type of English book proscribed by the Nazis?"

"When relations between the Germans and us in Denmark became bad, they said we must not read anything English written after 1914. But we got over that by translating and publishing English classics and gradually became very well furnished with English literature. Most Danes know some English; they learn it at school and it is spoken in most of the Copenhagen shops. The sympathies of the Danes have always been with England."

## How the Underground Worked

"Would you tell us something about the Danish underground movement?"

"Yes; literature played its part there too. The members of the movement worked hard at translating English books secretly. Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down* was translated by students and circulated in stencil copies, proceeds from sales going to the funds of the movement. This is a really splendid story, reflecting faithfully the feelings of the Danes and giving an excellent idea of the types of German officers we encountered. It made a big impression in Denmark."

"How did the war resistance movement operate?"

"First of all, you know, of course, that it was very strong—so strong that, shortly after the liberation, General Montgomery who came to see us told us it was second to none in its effectiveness. And I don't think he is the sort of man to make a remark like that just to be flattering."

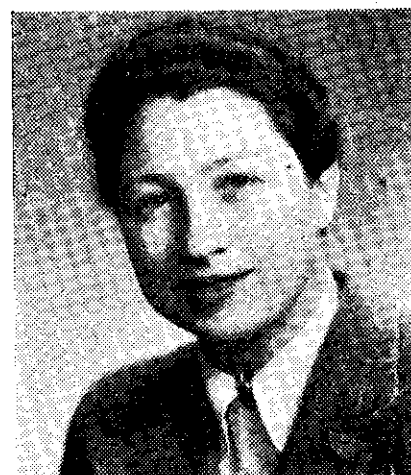
## The Visitors Were Uneasy

"Our saboteurs did a lot of damage to railways. Every day lines were put out of order to hinder German troop movements. This helped to create a feeling of uneasiness and danger among them and lowered their morale."

"I suppose you know that the Germans tried to use our industries for their own purposes. One by one they were sabotaged—sometimes at night and sometimes in broad daylight. The way the underground people did it was to warn workers secretly to get out of a factory at a certain time; then it blew up unaccountably."

"The Germans had their counter-sabotage by way of revenge. They destroyed famous buildings like the Tivoli in Copenhagen and executed numbers of people, sending others to concentration camps. But the Germans didn't find it easy to discover our saboteurs. They were hidden and protected by the people and especially by the Danish police."

"Another way of hindering the Germans was to sound a bogus 'alert.' This caused immediate confusion among our 'visitors.' By way of reprisal, they



Spencer Digby photograph

MRS. KARL ESKEKUND  
"The BBC news cheered us up"

occupied our police stations and sent the policemen to Germany. So, for the last few months of the war, we had no police at all, and robberies and other forms of lawlessness were committed by German soldiers."

## Soldiers Outwitted

"Do you remember any special acts of sabotage?"

"One piece of work amused us very much. The Germans held one of our rifle and ammunition factories. Soldiers called one day and ordered the workers to load up cases of arms for the use of troops. But when they were unloaded all they contained were German uniforms."

"Why has the food situation in Denmark been so good through all the trouble?"

"We, like New Zealand, are a food-producing country. German occupation did not make a great deal of difference for they knew that if they killed off all the cattle and pigs, that would be the end of their own supply. Our butter is rationed in about the same proportion as in New Zealand and our only serious shortages are tea, coffee, and tobacco. We tried growing our own tobacco, but it was of poor quality."

"We are a bit short of fuel. All our coal is imported from England in exchange for butter and bacon, so we have had to do our best with peat fires. There have been heavy restrictions on the use of gas and electricity, so you see, again we are like New Zealand."

## The BBC Helped

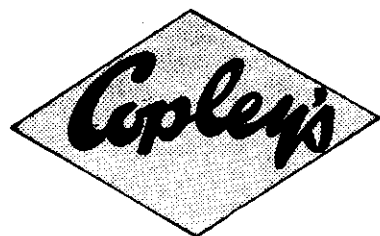
"How did you fare for radio news during the German occupation?"

"Although the Germans took over the radio, we were able to listen to Sweden, which put out all the news. And of course everybody listened to the BBC. The Danes were always confident of the Allies' success and the BBC news cheered us up a lot in the dark days. The German troops tried to impress with the awful damage done to England by V1 and V2 weapons. We thought it was only propaganda and did not realise how serious it was until the British troops arrived."

Mrs. Eskelund said that she and her husband were much impressed with good music heard from the NBS. "We have hungered for it so much, so we bought a radio yesterday," she added.

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