

## University of Northern Iowa

---

Denmark and the Treaty

Author(s): Gertrude Atherton

Source: *The North American Review*, Vol. 175, No. 551 (Oct., 1902), pp. 500-505

Published by: [University of Northern Iowa](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25119314>

Accessed: 22-10-2015 15:22 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Northern Iowa is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The North American Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## DENMARK AND THE TREATY.

BY GERTRUDE ATHERTON.

---

THE time has not yet come to tell the whole story of the negotiations between the United States and Denmark regarding the projected sale of the Virgin Islands belonging to the Danish crown. When it does come, the tale will prove as interesting and extraordinary as any chapter in diplomatic history, non-official as has been the greater part of the transaction. But although that must wait, this is the time, before the possible ratification by the Landsting of the pending treaty, for certain facts to be put before the American people.

Even although every one of the charges of the adventurer, Christmas, against reputable American citizens was proved to be false, and although his broad assertion that Senator Lodge was the only American official who could not be bribed sank of its own weight, even in disgusted Denmark, still the fact remains that he has discredited us in Europe; neither Mr. Cannon's admission in the House of Representatives that Christmas had proved himself "a briber and worse than a thief," nor the liberal coupling with his name by the American press of still more opprobrious epithets, can alter the historic fact that the pending treaty is practically his treaty, and that the Administration and Senate, ignorant though they were of his true character and purpose, ratified it. It is all very well for the Prime Minister of Denmark and the American Secretary of State to repudiate Christmas, to have flung him overboard with contumely at a certain stage of the game; the cold truth is, the negotiations he set on foot have never been interrupted, that the present situation is on his wheels, awkward and blocked as they may be. When, at the request of the American Secretary of State, he brought Mr. Henry White, of the United States Embassy in Great Britain, to Den-

mark to hold a private conference with the Foreign Minister, Mr. Ravn, he was allowed to pass in that secret representative of the United States Government, but had the door shut in his own face. Nevertheless, the subsequent steps taken by the United States were the direct result of that conference between Mr. Ravn (representing the Prime Minister, who could not speak English) and Mr. White; and Christmas, acting under the instructions of our Administration, brought about that conference. By the impartial historian his malodorous name must be used many times when the chapter on this treaty is written—if the treaty be allowed to stand, and the chapter *is* written.

Many of the strongest men in the United States government are dissatisfied with the treaty. The truth is, we do not want any more colonies. Our explosive imperialism has subsided. The Philippines have chastened us. Porto Rico is a charitable institution which has made us appear almost selfish in the eyes of the world. Cuba is an impending and tumultuous problem. Had Porto Rico redeemed herself by a fine harbor, even Protection, that armed genie of loud voice and anxious eye, who presides at the mouth of our harbor, who might indeed be called the conscientious step-father of his country, even he might have conceded to the fertile island an excuse for existence; and, after the close of the war with Spain, there would have been no re-opening of the Danish Islands question. But a harbor in the West Indies we must have, and Denmark possesses two at the very gateway of those waters which divide the Americas and bristle with the forts of foreign Powers. Some day the great canal will be built, and we must be able to strike quickly when it is menaced. Some day the Monroe Doctrine will be ignored, and the blow will be dealt in the Caribbean Sea. Germany's ambitions are almost ingenuous. The menace of Russia is known to every student of the times: she has never retraced a step nor ceased to advance; her movements are as firm and deliberate as they are stealthy.

Therefore, for more than a quarter of a century it has been patent to American statesmen that the United States must have a stronghold in the Caribbean Sea. After the failure of the negotiations of 1867 for the Islands of St. Thomas and St. John, the matter lay fallow until January, 1897. From that date until April 1st, 1898, secret, non-official negotiations were carried on between the two governments, the commissioners in the United

States being Mr. Niels Grön, a native of Denmark and an American citizen, and a graduate of Harvard, Mr. Henry H. Rogers, of the Standard Oil Company, and Mr. Charles R. Flint; Mr. Grön being the accredited representative of the sale committee in Denmark, which in turn, acted with the full authority of the Government. These three gentlemen had, after a long and delicate manipulation, and in concert with what is said to be the strongest and most representative committee ever formed in Denmark, almost brought the matter to a head, Senator Lodge having on April 1st, 1898, introduced a bill asking Congress to appropriate \$5,000,000 for the purchase of the Islands, when the Spanish war-cloud burst, and Denmark was obliged to withdraw temporarily or be guilty of diplomatic discourtesy to Spain.

When the war finished, Mr. Grön and his former associates realized that it was useless to take up the question of the Danish Islands again, until the agitation over Porto Rico and the tariff had been soothed by some sort of compromise; and they let it lie in abeyance. Then came the disgraceful Christmas episode, which is too recent history to repeat.

Even the erratic imagination of this anxious adventurer could conceive no improvement on the treaty whose details he had managed to discover, although our conditions had so materially changed since its plan had seemed the most feasible to the two committees; as well as to the high authorities in both countries. The enormous increase in our yearly expenses was not taken into consideration, to say nothing of a whole series of problems which the Spanish War had brought to a country heretofore almost without a foreign policy. There being no hint from Denmark that anything short of the sale of the entire group would be considered by her, and Mr. Grön, Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Flint having thrown up the whole matter rather than be associated with the new commissioner, we ratified the Christmas treaty, and two things happened: there arose a loud and determined protest in Denmark, and the Report of Captain Christmas was made public.

This Report, intended for a very narrow circle, and amounting practically to a blackmail of the Danish Government, contained the accusations of bribery and corruption of American citizens with which we are familiar; and Mr. Grön, as one of the accused, and the prime mover in the whole matter, demanded an investigation by the United States Congress. During his testimony before

The Select Committee on Purchase of the Danish Islands, he offered a treaty as substitute for the original treaty—having received by cable from Denmark an assurance that “strongest business men, bankers, land-owners, admirals, generals, president supreme court, first bishop, and members of parliament belonging to both parties” approved of it—which, if offered at another time, would probably have been considered at once. But a certain force, which must be nameless now, got to work then, and a cable was sent from Copenhagen severely discrediting Mr. Grön. The newspapers in the United States which resented his airing of the Administration’s intimate dealings with Christmas, took the matter up; and, as the cable gave a great but unnamed official as authority, Mr. Grön was under a cloud during the investigation; and until the Prime Minister of Denmark and leading members of the Landsting (Upper House) publicly exonerated him. His treaty still stands, however, and will be referred to presently.

During the negotiations before the Spanish War absolute secrecy had been maintained. Consequently, the temper of Denmark was unknown, and the royal family and certain high officials, although deeply opposed to parting with their Islands, had yielded because it seemed the best thing to do: St. Croix was in desperate straits, and the yearly deficit in the budget of the untaxed group was six hundred thousand kroners; which sum had to be made good by the home government.

When the proceedings were made public in April, 1898, there was a protest in Denmark which subsided as quickly as it rose; for it was believed that the Spanish War would put an end to the matter. Upon the re-agitation of the question in 1900, however, it was heard again and was—and is—loud, persistent, and determined. This protest is by no means wholly political, as is imagined in America; it is more than two-thirds sentimental. Denmark is a small country, but she is a very proud and valiant one; with a reputation for brains and practical energy quite out of proportion to her size, and a unique position among the sovereign states of Europe through her gifts to three of its thrones. She is the only state in Europe which, at one time or another, has never been in vassalage; and in 1864, to save Schleswig, which from remotest antiquity had been a part of her realm, unhesitatingly pitted her thousands against the tens of thousands of Austria and Prussia although she knew that not a soldier of hers

might return from the battle-field. The loss of Schleswig is to-day as deep a grief as it was in 1864, and Prussia's failure to keep her promise to restore the northern Danish districts and her petty persecution of loyal Danes in the Duchy are a constant and bitter cause of resentment. Therefore the secret of her indignant protest against parting with the gems of her colonial possessions. Three million five hundred thousand kroners were immediately subscribed, to be invested for the relief of St. Croix, should the Government decline to ratify the treaty; and the upper classes, almost to a man, stood out against the sale. The Folkething (Lower House) represents the peasantry, who, knowing nothing of the principles upon which our Constitution is founded, were persuaded that if Denmark did not get her \$5,000,000 as quickly as possible, we would appropriate the Islands without further parley; and to them Christmas's estimate of American officials seems too natural to be set aside by a mere investigation.

In the midst of the protest, came the publication of Christmas's Report, and its demand for the recognition of his claim of ten per cent. of the sale price, that he might settle with the Americans he had bribed; and the delay consequent upon the investigation by the American Congress. The Rigsdagen adjourned until October, and there the matter now stands.

Meanwhile, the substitute treaty is well known to meet with the approval of the party opposed to the sale of the Islands. Its conditions are as follows:

That Denmark shall cede to the United States either St. Thomas or St. John, both of which Islands have excellent harbors; that she shall guarantee never to sell the other Islands to any Power whatsoever, except the United States of America; that the United States shall, in return, arrange for tariff concessions to St. Croix.

No money will change hands, and the United States will have the additional advantage of almost encompassing Denmark with the Monroe Doctrine, thus giving herself an excuse to check Russia, when that cormorant makes her first sign of closing in upon Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and threatens American trade in the Baltic. Denmark would part with one of her Islands without regret, on account of the great advantage accruing to the most important, commercially, of the group, St. Croix; and the United States would gain the only advantage she wants, and be delivered from another incubus.

Not only would Denmark be quite satisfied with this settlement of the Islands problem, but she would like the idea of a little alliance with the United States, as it were. Like all the world she is awake and restless, looking about for new friends, for opportunities that may lead to future greatness, and win her the admiration of more powerful states. As a Dane remarked the other day: "All the nations are trying to get into society." She already has one of the finest steamship lines in Europe, and half a million kroners have been deposited as a guarantee that a service shall be established to the West Indies, should she retain two of her Islands.

The sentiment in the Islands is too complicated to be set forth in detail here, but all unite on one point: something must be done at once for St. Croix, which is well over the verge of ruin. A majority are for the sale, no doubt, but three points have not been brought home to them: (1) There will be exactly the same determined opposition in the United States to their commercial interests as Porto Rico has experienced, and a further delay in which they may starve; (2) They will be heavily taxed, made to support themselves; for the United States is not sentimental, and will pay no annual hundred and fifty thousand dollars deficit; (3) Most important of all: it may be several years before they can get their sugar, rum, etc., to New York without enormous expense. According to the laws of the United States, no foreign ship may carry goods between two American ports. The larger part of the products of the Lesser Antilles is carried to the United States by the Quebec Steamship Co., which flies the British flag. Naturally, after leaving St. Kitts, these cargo steamers will sail directly for New York, ignoring the new American ports. The Messrs. Outerbridge will be obliged either to buy at once new steamers flying the American colors, for the sole object of getting the sugar and rum of one small island and the bay-rum of another to New York, or to change their flag, a long, laborious and expensive process. Again, St. Croix may starve. She is between the devil and the deep sea, and the only procedure which can save her is a new treaty.

The point in this treaty which vitally concerns us is, that it will be untainted.

GERTRUDE ATHERTON.