SKETCHES OF LITTLE-KNOWN STAMP COUNTRIES

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HELIGOLAND

The small group of islands, or rather islets, of which the subject of this article is the principal, were described by the Egyptian geographer Ptolemy, between seventeen and eighteen hundred years ago, as the Alokai islands. In the “dark ages” it was called Foretiseland, and was the seat of a peculiar worship paid to an idol, the Hertha, or Mother Earth of the Scandinavians, the venerated Roman Vesta.

A map of the place is extant, imaging the sites of temples, cities, and villages, intermixed with woods and fields: all long since engulfed (sic) by the mighty waves of the German ocean! This ancient deity, whose temple was turned into a monastery in the middle of the ninth century, who shall say how many ages remained the tutelary goddess of eight powerful tribes? Of these, five are known by name only; two of them, the Varini and the Lombards, are represented by existing descendants; he eighth – the bold Angli – while the planet, whose name was derived from the goddess, shall endure, may ever claim pre-eminence thereon.

Heligoland, or Heilgeland, as it is also called, meaning Holy Land, is about a mile long, and never half that distance broad. On the high ground there are about 350 houses: on the low, only 78, and these are merely fishermen’s huts. In the beginning of the present century, the population amounted to 2,200: the odd hundreds must now be subtracted. The soil is cultivated for barley and oats, and affords pasture for perhaps 60 cows, and 400 or 500 sheep. About £10,000 worth of fish were exported annually. From this and a large oyster bed is derived the revenue of the islands. They manage also to pay £4 per cent on a respectable National Debt of £5,000. The Governor, General Maxse, at present, is appointed by the English Crown in whose possession the place has been since September, 1807, when it surrendered to the blockading squadron of Admiral Russell. By the Paris treaties of 1814-15 it was definitely transferred to Great Britain.

Since 1826 it has been resorted to as a bathing place; and, like many other German resorts for invalids, started gambling tables to amuse their healthy companions, or whoever else chose to combine dissipation with rustic felicity; but, last Derby Day The Times announced that a storm had been raging in one of England’s colonial puddles; that public attention had been called a year or two since to the fact, that while we were censuring the potentates of Hamburg and Baden for sanctioning public play, just such another “little game” was carried on under our eyes in Heligoland, where the governmental revenue was entirely derived from the tax paid by the gambling firm, to whom the right of pillaging the public was farmed out. As a wretched punster observed – the hells of Helgoland, must go out of the land. So thought the governor, and notice to quit was served on the croupiers, &c.

The inhabitants were furious at the consequences of this, viz., a tax to fill the void created: they held indignation meetings, sent petition after petition to Downing Street, and elected a parliamentary pledged to resists the imposition of all taxes whatever. The governor is, however, firm, and gaming is prohibited forever. – The Philatelist.