

SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT

SOME years ago, I felt an urge to go Somewhere Different for my summer holiday. After studying various brochures I concluded that the Faroe Islands answered this criterion. This involved sailing from Harwich to Esbjerg in Denmark, train to Copenhagen, and then by ship to the Faroe Islands. Having booked beforehand, all the tickets arrived except the sailing ticket from Copenhagen. I was told to apply at the quayside office where it would be awaiting my collection. A hazardous method of application, I thought.

The voyage to Esbjerg was uneventful. The train to Copenhagen, being the boat train, was full. In my carriage was a party of young people, one of whom was a very extrovert young lady who talked to anyone who cared to listen. Then she started asking each of us in turn where we were going. Most said Copenhagen or the surrounding countryside. "And where are you going?" she asked me. I told her I was staying in Copenhagen for two nights, then sailing to the Faroe Islands. "The Faroes!" she exclaimed, "You are going far enough, aren't you? I hope you enjoy it!"

After two days in the city I made my way to the quayside office to collect my ticket. I thought "supposing it isn't here, and I've come all this way for nothing", however on giving my name and destination the clerk said "Are you going to the Faroes?", having answered "Yes", he added, "Well, it's a lovely trip" and handed me my ticket.

The first part of the trip wasn't so lovely. Having boarded, sorted myself out and found my bearings, by the time I was ready it was almost dinner time. The first sitting had almost finished, so I sat in the lounge and waited. They soon emerged, and they included the President of the DFDS, (Danish Seaways) and his lady, who sat down at my table and started talking. They asked me not to publicise who they were. Whether they told anyone else this, I don't know, but I kept my side of the bargain. In the course of conversation, they told me they were going to Iceland. I was very happy and gratified to be able to tell them something of that fascinating country, having visited it myself some years earlier.

Then it was the second sitting for dinner. A Danish lady sat opposite me at table and started talking - she could speak English. During the meal the wind rose and there was quite a storm. Gradually the dining room emptied as people retired to their cabins, my new Danish friend was amongst the first. I stuck it out until after the first course, then had to go myself. This annoyed me somewhat, as the pudding was strawberries and cream, of which I am very fond. Also, having paid for it previously, I was not getting my money's worth, was I? Later I discovered that the storm was a force eight gale.

We docked the following morning at Torshavn, much to everyone's relief. My Danish friend, for some obscure reason, had taken to me and asked if we could exchange addresses, which we did, and have been friends ever since. After checking in at the hotel and settling in, I still felt a little queasy so I decided to go for a walk a) to get my land legs going, and b) to explore the environs.

The first notice I saw said in English, "Fish and Chips"; I thought "Oh no, surely not here!" Never having been very fond of that particular dish, I did not investigate. In fact, it almost brought on my queasiness again! Instead, I munched an apple and by the time of my return to the hotel, felt somewhat revived.

The following morning I walked down to the Information Bureau to enquire about trips available. I was able to go somewhere different each day for the five days I spent on the islands; both boat trips and bus excursions were listed. One small cargo boat which took a few passengers, called the Garnli Smyril, plied the islands. Another was by ferry and car, very well synchronised, going north. The scenery was lovely, reminiscent of Norway, with deep fjords cutting into the coast. Driving alongside one of these, the reflection of the surrounding hills overlooking the deep, clear water was remarkable. The car driver suddenly said in English, "If you would like to stop to take photographs, please don't hesitate to ask." I did not expect to hear very much English away from the hotel.

On another boat whilst waiting for departure time, over the ship's radio was broadcast the equivalent of the BBC's Daily Service. To my pleasant surprise, I knew the hymn tune they were singing, so was able to hum it! For those interested, it was no. 200 in the English Hymnal, probably to totally different words! Of course all sung in Danish. After dinner on the second evening, I was told I was wanted on the 'phone. Wanted on the phone? Whatever for, I wondered. Had my mother, with whom I was living, been taken ill and was calling me from home? Alarmed and puzzled I answered the call. A male voice came from the other end of the line, "I understand that you have a message from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Bishop of Iceland" Astonished, I nearly dropped the phone. Explaining that they definitely had the wrong person, apologies were profuse. Next morning I determined to find out who the purveyor of the said message was. Two ladies, obviously English, were discovered to be messengers. They, too, were full of apologies. We had a laugh over it I saying that I had been privileged to meet one or two bishops, but not the Archbishop of Canterbury!

The five days in the Faroes were over. They were all most enjoyable. The weather had been good, in fact my Danish friend subsequently told me it was the best summer they had enjoyed in years. Scenery was splendid, and the bird life interesting. The summer days are long in that latitude, and the fields are full of wild flowers. The light is ever-changing, the clouds casting dappled shadows on the fields and cliffs, the sea blue, with the air clear and bracing. Happily I have photographs to prove it. The voyage back to Copenhagen was beautiful, calm and clear. Checking in at the hotel where I had stayed before, the young man at the reception said "I think I have seen you before" (Once seen, never forgotten?) Replying in the affirmative, I said I had just returned from the Faroes. "The Faroes!" he exclaimed. "Have you been there? It must have been lovely".

Yes, indeed it was, most memorable in every way. If one can chance the weather, a visit is well worth while. Definitely, Somewhere Different.

(Mrs.) Shirley Jackson.