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THE CHURCH IN FINLAND

By THE REV. G. W. KERR, B.A., LL.B.

THE visit of Dr. Headlam, Bishop of Gloucester, last May, to Finland, on the invitation of Dr. Gummerus, Bishop of Tammerfors, will strengthen the traditional friendship between Finland and Great Britain. We in this country owe a debt of gratitude to the Finns, for in 1918 they put down a revolution organized by Soviet Russia, and thus checked Bolshevism from spreading to western Europe. Finland is now an Independent State, and looks to Great Britain for the secret of her moral ascendancy. This country has always been closely associated with the destinies of Finland, for, while Englishmen have played a leading part in the ecclesiastical life of the country, Scotsmen—Dr. Finlayson and others—have helped to develop its industrial resources.

In the twelfth century, Pope Adrian IV (formerly known as Nicholas Breakspear, Cardinal of St. Albans) founded the Metropolitan See of Upsala, in Sweden, and appointed another Englishman, Henry, as the first Bishop. Bishop Henry authorized King Eric of Sweden to start a Crusade to convert the pagan Finns. Henry baptized the first converts at Abo. He is the Patron Saint of Finland, and Festivals in his honour were the first National Feasts common to the whole people.

In the next century another Englishman, Bishop Thomas, conceived a plan of severing Finland from Sweden, and making it an Independent Catholic State under the Suzerainty of the Pope. This plan did not succeed, but its inception is a testimony to the strength, even in those early days, of the Finnish National Spirit, which centuries of oppression failed to crush. Bishop Thomas was the organizer of the Finnish Church, and commenced the building of the only cathedral Finland has ever possessed, at Abo. During the Middle Ages successive Bishops of Abo were native-born Finns, who not only took a prominent position in affairs of State, but represented Finland in diplomatic relations with other countries, and Abo Cathedral was the National Sanctuary of Finland.

As a result of three Crusades by the Swedes, which combined the zeal of the missionary with the passions of the military adventurer, Finland became part of the Kingdom of Sweden. For over 600 years she was the buffer State on which intermittent warfare was waged between Sweden and Russia. Hers was a tragic history, but from Sweden she acquired culture and the traditions of European civilization.

In 1808 Russia found a pretext for annexing Finland, and though Alexander I made Finland a Grand Duchy, and solemnly undertook, on behalf of himself and his successors, to safeguard the rights and liberties of the Finns, the Covenant was not observed by his successors, and Finland felt the full force of Russian tyranny. A turning point in her fortunes came in the Great War: when the

Russian Empire collapsed, Finland claimed her independence, and her claim was recognized by the Great Powers. She became a member of the League of Nations, and accepted the ruling of the League with regard to the Aland Islands, and so composed an outstanding quarrel with Sweden.

The Reformation was carried through in Finland, as in Sweden, without any violent revolution, but chiefly in the form of an internal reorganization of the National Church in an Evangelical spirit, while adhering to primitive forms. Michael Agricola, a pupil of Martin Luther, was the leader of the Reformation. He became the first Lutheran Bishop, and gave to the people for the first time the New Testament in their native tongue. It is recorded that when some timid members of his flock expressed a fear that God might not understand their prayers unless said in Latin, the Bishop assured them that He, who could read the inarticulate desires of the heart, would understand His children when they prayed in their own language. Agricola drew up a reformed Catechism, and commenced the work of National education, which until recently has been entirely promoted by the clergy, and with such remarkable success that there is scarcely any illiteracy in the country. The Finnish Church is founded on education, the clergy have always refused to marry persons unless they have been confirmed, or to confirm those who could not read and write. It is due to the Church that to-day education is almost a passion among the people, and that in town and village Institutes working-men assemble to study English, Science, and Philosophy, not for material advancement, but for the joy of intellectual activity. (Did not J. S. Mill observe that Democracy would justify itself when working-men could enjoy reading the sonnets of Wordsworth?)

Episcopacy was not abolished at the Reformation in Finland, as in Germany, though Bishops ceased to be temporal rulers, controlling armies, and confined themselves to their spiritual functions. Apostolic succession was retained up to the year 1884: in that year, however, all the Finnish Bishops died, and as it was not considered desirable to seek Consecration from abroad, the new Bishops were consecrated by a duly ordained clergyman. The Church of Finland acknowledges no essential difference between Ordination by a bishop and Ordination by a clergyman.

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century the Lutheran Church was in the strictest sense a State Church, and every citizen was compelled to belong to it. The local Church Community was responsible for municipal administration, poor relief and other social services. The Clergy had the right of representation in the Diet, as one of the four estates, with the Nobility, Burghers, and Peasantry. During the nineteenth century, as a result of a religious revival, and the spread of secularism, a tendency arose to separate the functions of Church and State, and to regard religion as the concern of the individual conscience. Then, gradually, the State assumed these social functions in which the Church had been the pioneer. To-day, the Church in Finland is under the control of

the State, but enjoys a large measure of freedom, and is the National Church in virtue of the fact that the majority of the population are adherents.

Finland is divided into five Dioceses, and these into Deaneries and Parishes. In the Church Assembly, as in the Diet, women vote as well as men, and the system of Proportional Representation has been adopted. The Church Assembly is composed of 38 Clergy and 54 Laymen. The standard of Scholarship for candidates for the Ministry is high—four years at the University and two years in a Theological College. When a living is vacant, the Bishop invites applications to be sent to him within 60 days. He then selects three candidates and submits their names to the congregation to choose the one whom they prefer. For the election of a Bishop the Clergy of the Diocese select three men and submit their names to the President of the Republic, who makes the appointment. In the administration of the Church persons of either sex are entitled to one vote at the age of 24, to two votes when they reach 40—a tribute to the riper wisdom of middle life: ten years of married life confer a third vote—the maximum. Who but the bachelor or spinster would grudge this graceful recognition of the valuable experience of wedlock? Great stress is laid on the rite of Confirmation, which is administered, not by the Bishops, but by the Parochial Clergy. The age for Confirmation is 16, and the instruction given in school is supplemented by 100 hours of special teaching in Confirmation classes. An organist attends, and the hymnal as a Manual of Instruction takes its place with the Prayer Book and Bible.

The Church has successfully withstood the propaganda and missionary activities of the Roman Church, which has recently appointed a Bishop, who lives in the capital. The last official census numbers the Roman Catholics in the country as 420. The people are frankly Protestant, and are repelled by Sacerdotalism and the materialistic doctrine of the Mass. The Church has shown a greater power of resistance than the Lutheran Churches in Sweden and Norway to the forces of German Rationalism. The State levies for the maintenance of the Clergy a tax on all citizens—a minimum contribution of one-half of one per cent. Citizens have a right to contract out by declaring that they are not members of the Lutheran Church. Only twenty thousand out of a population of four and a half million avail themselves of this opportunity—a sign that the Church has found a place in the respect and love of the people. Dissent is almost a negligible quantity, although complete freedom is secured by law to any citizen to join or leave any sect he pleases—a privilege not allowed when Russia was in control. The Greek Orthodox Church is almost confined to the monastery of Valamo, an island in Lake Ladoga, on the borders of Russia. This monastery is a quaint survival and a popular resort for tourists, who are entertained in a vast Hostel, and watch with interest a colony of priests who are self-supporting, and who are trained as doctors, farmers, fruit-growers, etc. Although the Church in Finland is free from unhappy divisions caused by divergent views of doctrine

and ritual, she is faced by formidable barriers of race and language, for the Nation is bi-lingual and consists of Finns proper and Swedish Finns. The difficulty is surmounted by a brilliant device. One parish is superimposed upon another. The Bishop will appoint two ministers, each with his own church, or if the population is small, one church is used at different hours by the two congregations, just as Garrison churches are employed in this country. In this way unity is secured without uniformity.

The order of Divine Service is modelled on that of the Middle Ages. The Evangelical impress is given in the hymns and sermon; the latter is usually of a revivalistic character, to awaken the conscience of the hearers. It is still the custom for the minister to wear a chasuble, but the Holy Communion is regarded as the Lord's Supper, and vestments have merely an aesthetic significance.

The Finnish Church is feeling the urge of those great movements which are stirring the minds of Christian people throughout the world. Last summer 1,050 representatives of the Y.M.C.A., from almost every country in the world, met in Helsingfors to consider "the Claim of Christ upon the Young," in reponse to the World Call. There is a growing interest in studying the social aspect of Christianity, in the permeation of every department of life—civil, commercial, political—by the Christian ethic, as opposed to the theory of a Church divorced from the life of a Nation. The Society for the Evangelisation of Industrial Centres functions in settlements, meetings and welfare work, and has promoted social legislation for an eight hours' day in factories, a week's holiday in the year with full pay, and the abolition of child labour. While all Scandinavian countries have been experimenting with Temperance Reform, the Finnish Government has boldly adopted Prohibition as the best policy for a Young State striving to build up her fortunes after centuries of oppression. Most of the Clergy support this movement, though its success is as problematical as in America.

The Church in Finland is confronted with the mighty, yet congenial task of shaping the destiny of a virile Nation which exults in her newly won freedom, and strives to express that freedom in Art and Literature, Industrial Expansion, and Social Betterment. Visitors to Helsingfors cannot fail to observe signs that Religion is a living force in the development of the new Finland. Among the churches which have recently been built, the church of Kallio, by Sonck, holds the spectator spell-bound with admiration. It represents an original style of Church Architecture. It is a statue-like monument of granite, composed of straight lines with little ornamentation, and yet it is an edifice of delicate and dream-like beauty. In the Athenæum are exhibited pictures of modern painters which show that Finland can claim a distinctive school of Art, and the great Masters—Edelfelt, Eckman, Jarnefelt—find their inspiration in religious subjects—"The Open-Air Service in the Archipelago," "Christ and the Magdalene" (a Finnish peasant girl at the feet of the Good Shepherd), or in illustrating the Kalevala—

that National storehouse of folk-lore, which is one of the world's great Epics. The Kalevala shows the early struggles between Paganism and Christianity, and the indomitable courage of hardy pioneers contending with the forces of Nature—flood, storm and fire.

It is in the home life of the people that Religion is most potent. Every woman regards her home as her chief interest, and desires to make it the expression of her personality. Marriages are solemnized in the home, not in the Church, and in country parishes, some of which are as vast in extent as an English Diocese, the minister holds services in the outlying farms, which the neighbours attend.

The Finns are likely to increase their prestige among the Nations of Europe. They have been compared to the Scotch, the Irish, the Japanese, the Americans, and the inhabitants of one of the ancient Greek States, and the comparison suggests a wonderful versatility. As emigrants they are eagerly welcomed by our Dominions overseas: Canada admits seven thousand Finns every year, and while the original emigrants may long for the old homeland, their children become true Britons in sentiment, outlook and loyalty to the Throne.

LETTERS ON RELIGION AND FOLKLORE. By the late F. W. Hasluck, M.A. Annotated by Margaret M. Hasluck, B.A. (Cantab), M.A. (Abdn.). *Luzac & Co.* 12s. 6d. net.

This volume contains many extracts from letters written to Professor R. M. Dawkins, which have been copied and annotated by the writer's wife. These letters discussed not only the interplay of Islam and Christianity in the East, but also the transition in the West from paganism to Christianity and the evolution of Christianity from the "Pelagian" to the "Olympian" stage. Besides discussing Christianity the book gives a considerable amount of information on varied subjects gleaned by the author in various by-paths of the Near East, and include notes on Architecture (there are 29 excellent illustrations) and there is an interesting excursion into Balkan Folklore and the part played by Syria in disseminating both Christian and Mohammedan legends. The book being in the form of letters not meant for publication but written for the diversion of a friend and covering a period from April, 1914, to February, 1920, gives much out-of-the-way information of an interesting character.