

Our English Page

Social conditions in Sweden and Finland.

By H. P. A. Hermanson.

In the public press as well socially, economically and on the public platform, we have during the last few years, often been treated with opinions as to whether any particular foreign nationalities among those contributing to the population of Canada possess special qualities of desirability as settlers in this great Dominion. In my remark tonight, I have no desire to draw any comparison between different nationalities, as I believe there are good and bad among us all. "Comparisons are odious," Shakespeare said. There is no question that in every national group there are both desirable and undesirable elements and it would be grossly unfair, in my opinion, to brand a whole nationality as undesirable because of failures or misdemeanors of individuals in that particular group.

It is very interesting to trace the progress of woman's participation in national affairs in Sweden. It is perhaps much more interesting because of the fact that at no time has there been any form of militant feminist movement in that country, but the progress has been one of recognition of women's rights rather than granting of favors. The first woman recorded in Swedish history is Elenora, in the days of the Vikings, who, when her home town was endangered by enemies — the men of the community being away at the front — with the assistance of other women successfully fought the invaders and caused them to flee from the battle field. From that day gradual recognition has been given to the place of women in the matters of interest to the nation.

As early as the year 1236, he then dictator of Sweden, Birger Jarl, or Earl Birger, caused a law to be placed on the statute books forbidding slavery of any kind. While slavery as it was known in America never did exist in Sweden, there was prior to his period, a form of servitude resembling slavery, and his was, as stated, prohibited by law as early as 1236. Another law, far reaching in its effect, placed on the statute books at the same period, was an inheritance law granting the sister a share in the parents' estate equal to one-half of her brother's. Up to his time the son or sons only, had inherited the whole of the father's estate. This was probably the first recognition of women's rights in matters of inheritance. Since that time it has developed until today a woman is

politically on an equal footing with a man. They share alike in estates and a man cannot own any other person. It is recognized in Swedish law that a man and wife share equally in wealth accumulated during the period of their marriage. Any property owned by either party before the marriage remains his or hers. A point which may be of interest to us in Canada is that a child benefits from parents' estate whether born in wedlock or outside.

While the position of women in Sweden has always been comparatively good, it was really not until the French Revolution and the principle of democracy promulgated the right of the individual to free and equal competition, that the principle of the equality of women with men took definite form and became generally acknowledged. Since that time and under this influence, a series of reforms has been introduced in Sweden, which have not only made the position of women in the main equal to that with men in the point of law, but also provided possibilities for them for instruction and training in vocations and business. Even if this progress should mainly be ascribed to the general tendencies of the times, and has been sponsored by prominent men in realms of philosophy, social science and politics, efforts of women themselves have very largely contributed to the result. Fredrika Bremer may be considered as a real originator of modern women's movements, and her work has subsequently been continued by prominent representatives of women. As foremost among those may be mentioned the prominent authoress Anna Maria Lenngren, as well as Ellen Key, also a prominent authoress and leader of women. Selma Lagerlöf, the winner of the Nobel prize in literature and now well known throughout the world through her writings, also took a very prominent part in the advancement of women.

The Fredrika Bremer Association, formed in 1844, had as its object "The assembling of the women of Sweden on politically neutral ground by common social work, to improve their capacity and sense of responsibility as citizens, educators, and workers in various departments, and to work for the improvement of the position of women in home, in society and in the state." The Civic Association of Swedish Women, formed in

1921, has as its object the training of women for the proper use of their political suffrage granted to them in that year.

With the reforms in marriage laws, women's suffrage, and eligibility for Government service etc., carried during the last decade, the equality of men and woman in Sweden may be said in reality to be complete. The principal cause of the women's movement having thus almost disappeared, the circles concerned have since devoted themselves chiefly to fighting prejudices against the work of women, which may furnish an explanation of the fact that free competition has up to now given less room for women than might have been expected. But already at an early date, interested women had reacted against the underestimation of the specific, sex-determined work of women in family life and society, of which it had earlier been impossible to acquit the women's movement. Ellen Key, who died in 1926, exercised a dominating influence on public opinion in this respect, not only in Sweden, but all over the world, by her extensive writings on the subject.

In his book "Finland Today" Mr. Frank Fox, of London, England, writes:

"Finland is well worthy of the study of the sociologists of other countries. It is a country where, on the whole, a good balance has been struck between Freedom and licence; where the respective interests of Capital and of Labor, in the production of national wealth are being considered in a fair spirit; where there are no very rich and few very poor; where the standards of education are high and education is not interpreted in the narrow sense of solely 'book-learning'; where there is an excellent system of co-operation and a careful study is made of the preservation of the national physique."

There is no doubt that Finland is less known among the people generally in Canada and the United States, than any other European country. It is, however, a country which has made tremendous strides in social legislation, particularly with reference to women's rights, during the last quarter century. Finland was the first country in Europe to enfranchise women, a fact of which the Republic is very proud. The women's movement dates back to the year 1830, when it first started as a revivalist religious movement but later developed into a social and political movement. Finland's first woman author, Sara Wacklin, in a book called "A Hundred Reminiscences from Ostrobothnia" 1844, particularly stressed the necessity for better education of girls. She organized boarding schools for girls in several of the leading cities of Finland. She also planned a home of refuge for women in Helsinki, but owing to indignant opposition at that time, this plan fell through. Fredrika Runeberg, wife of the national poet, J. L. Runeberg, also intensely interested in women's reformatory work, advocated extended education

for women, the improvement of the married woman's position and the right for woman to choose her own work and obtain professional training. One of Finland's prominent novelists, Adelaide Ohnrooth, in her novels as well as in press articles, advanced the following claims: "Parents should be obliged to give their daughters the same education and professional training as their sons; women should have the same possibilities as men to obtain a livelihood and reputation; in matters of morals husband and wife should be equal before the law."

In 1906 franchise was granted to women and in the House of Representatives of 1907, there were no less than 19 women members. Since then there has been rapid progress. Today Finnish women are in a position of complete equality with men except that they cannot exercise the functions of clergyman or judge. All other professions or vocations are open to them on an equality with men.

Mr. Frank Fox, whom I previously quoted further states: "The educational system of Finland is excellent and there is practically no illiteracy, and every young citizen has a chance of obtaining a university education. There are some especially interesting features in the Finnish educational system. One is the Folk High Schools, which are a development of the Scandinavian institutions of the same type. It may be worthy of note that the influence of Sweden has been very strong in Finland ever since the present Republic was a part of the Swedish Kingdom prior to 1809. The Folk High Schools, especially designed for rural educational development, receive generous government grants, as well as substantial assistance from rural administration. A pupil's tuition fee, paid by himself, is \$2.50 for a school year and a further \$5.00 pays for the board and keep. The balance of the cost of the institution is paid by municipal and Government authorities by way of taxes.

Both countries, however, are largely agricultural in character. The farmstead is generally a happy, congenial, model home and as a rule occupied by the same family from generation to generation.

It has been my privilege to visit Sweden twice during the last five years, and I endeavored to make a particular study of the conditions existing in the rural portions of the country. I believe rural Canada could profit greatly from a study of conditions in that country. The cultural attainments of the people as a whole are well recognized and one finds it very vividly reflected in country homes. I found the home life in the country, as well as in the cities, built upon the solid foundation of honesty, integrity and good-will towards ones fellowmen in a most gratifying degree. The old folk songs and folk dances share space with the ancient Saga in the hearts of the people, and side by side with the most modern accomplishments in music and arts, serve as daily ration of spiritual food for the intellectual betterment

of the people in homes of the humble as well as the homes of the well-to-do.

I found the little farm home, perhaps picturesquely located on the shores of a small inland lake, contiguous to a small country village in full enjoyment of all the comforts and conveniences of a large city. Generations of cultivation and improvements, all this time by members of the same family, had developed a home which in every sense of the word could be called "a home". A little nearby stream sparklingly winding its way down the spruce-covered mountain-side joyously, emptying into the little lake, supplies energy for the home-built hydro station, which lights the comfortable house as well as the modern barn electrically.

The school, the church, the community hall, store and post office, all located but a short distance from the farm, conducted to the promotion of the sociable spirit, so essential to the welfare and intellectual betterment of the individual as well as the community as a whole. The evenings were spent by young and old alike, in wholesome enjoyment and the young girl or boy grew up eminently fitted to meet the demands of the age.

HUMOR.

If any one wish to know the difference between humor and wit, the laughter of the fool, which the wise man, by a similitude founded on deep observation, calls "the crackling of thorns under a pot," let him read Cervantes on the one hand, and on the other Voltaire, the greatest laughter the world ever knew. — Carlyle.

BLESSINGS.

Though the blessings of life and a competency of temporal favors, are every way desirable, yet they who are in a measure deprived of them should remember that poverty in itself is no real disgrace, though considered as such by those whose minds are influenced by custom and prejudice more than truth and benevolence.

På mycket kort tid kände han sig botad.

Saskatchewan-man använder Dodd's Kidney Pills.

Mr. S. Borowansky led av ryggvärk och reumatism.

Parkview, Sask., den 9 april. (Special)

"För ungefär tre år sedan led jag av ryggvärk och reumatism så att jag knappt kunde röra mig," skriver Mr. S. Borowansky bosatt här på platsen.

"En av mina vänner rådde mig att prova Dodd's Kidney Pills och efter att ha förbrukat en ask kände jag mig genast bättre. Så jag inköpte några fler askar, som på kort tid gav mig lindring."

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