

Messenger and Visitor.

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Finland. A highly interesting letter from a correspondent of the Toronto 'Globe,' giving an account of a recent visit to Finland, appeared in that journal in its issue of May 23. That country has become especially interesting because of recent events and because of the prospective migration of considerable numbers of its people to Canada. The 'Globe's' correspondent describes Finland as a country which has properly been called the land of the thousand lakes. Its area is about three-fourths that of the Province of Ontario and its population 2,500,000. It was long a battleground between Swedes and Russians. In 1520, however, it was given a constitutional form of government by the King of Sweden. Near the beginning of the present century Finland became a dependency of Russia, Alexander I. conferring upon it a constitutional form of government, which was subsequently amplified and confirmed by Alexander II. But Russia now proposes by an edict from the Czar to abolish all legislative control exercised by the Four Estates or Diet or Parliament of the Finlanders. General Bobrikov, who had previously carried out extreme measures in the southern Baltic Provinces, was appointed Governor-General of Finland, no doubt with a view of taking charge of the *coup d'état*. A special session of the Diet or Legislature is now meeting in secret session to consider the proposals from the Emperor, and it is safe to affirm that from the Four Estates or Houses—the Nobles, Clergy, Burghers and Peasants—there will be a firm, respectful and unanimous protest against the suggested curtailment of their rights. The late refusal of the Czar to receive the deputation of five hundred burghers and peasants, bearing a memorial signed by more than five hundred thousand inhabitants, praying that their rights, given and conferred to them by his predecessors, shall not be disturbed, has created an intense feeling of indignation throughout the country.

In the Finnish Capital. The capital city of Finland is Helsingfors, with a population of sixty or seventy thousand. It was the fortune of the writer alluded to above to be in the Finnish capital on the first of May. That is the occasion of the great annual procession or demonstration by the students of the Russian universities. The university at Helsingfors was the only one in Russia open on that date—all the others having been closed by the authorities on account of the fears that students would incite the populace to riot. The Russian officers claimed to be aware of a plot on the part of the students to cause trouble at Helsingfors. A walk up the principal streets and parks soon confirmed the impression that something extraordinary was on the tapis. But the probability of a riot could not be entertained for a moment, judging from the appearance of both students and populace. Every lady, and there were thousands on the streets, was dressed in black. In fact, this evidence of mourning has been universally adopted as a public protest against Russian aggression and in view of the sorrowful political outlook. The peasant women and girls, with but few exceptions, have laid aside their colored head shawls and wear black instead. The dry goods merchants cannot find sale for colored dress goods or millinery. The sombreness of the dresses would give the impression to a stranger having no knowledge of the cause that a plague of pestilence had swept over the community. . . . No evidence of disrespect was offered the military attaches of the Governor-General, except an unconscious expression of scorn that marked an otherwise serene countenance. The people most

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generally glanced in another direction when one of the richly-uniformed Russians passed. . . . Looking at the approaching line [of students], numbering between 2,500 and 3,000, including about 300 ladies, a sight was witnessed that cannot soon be forgotten. The men, in close-fitting coats, a bouquet of roses, lilies of the valley and smilax or ferns on every lapel, on the head a white peaked cap, less full than the ordinary Russian crown, with a black band. Every face a Scandinavian, very fair, bright complexion and rosy cheeks, the vast majority having very light hair, and not a real dark-haired lad among the number. The ladies wearing the same kind of cap and flowers, their complexions seeming fairer and richer with a rosy bloom, and hair lighter, no doubt on account of its profusion, than their companions of the other sex. Among the men there were not to be seen those duel-scarred faces so prevalent among continental students. But there was a manliness, a courage, an intellectual development and a maturity of character that swept out of my mind in an instant the mistaken conception of a lifetime regarding the character of Finlanders. I have seen students' processions in Canada and the United States, in England and France, but I never saw one more marked by intellectual force and power than this one of young Finlanders at Helsingfors." At the Park the students sang university and national songs, and the pathos and power with which they sang Finland's national hymn are described as wonderful.

Social Conditions. In respect to education the Finlanders are represented as being among the most advanced people of the age. Religiously they are almost entirely Lutherans, with the exception of some 50,000 who belong to the Greek Church. "There are practically none uneducated among the Lutherans. The common school is very thorough, a strong democratic feeling exists, and the high school fees are very low. Entrance to the university is equally open to all. This institution was founded by Queen Christina in 1640, and embraces science, law and medicine in its curriculum. In agriculture, which industry is the calling of the vast majority of the population, the Finlanders have adopted modern methods, and have among other means imported a large number of English cattle in order to improve their own. The dairying industry is growing in importance, last year 13,000 tons being exported. I visited their dairies and found them managed entirely by women. A fair proportion of the people are also extensively engaged in saw-mills, pulp-mills, paper-mills and tanneries, and they have their own sugar refineries. In their telephone conveniences they are as far ahead of Ontario as Ontario is ahead of Labrador. These are the people whom the Russians are determined to place under the same autocratic rule that they exercise over a semi-barbaric and uneducated population in other parts of the empire. To a country that has a history extending over many centuries of constitutional government, the yoke proposed by the Russian authorities is nothing short of slavery. The Diet of Finland is to cease having authority; it is to be simply an advisory body, whose advice will be more frequently scorned than accepted. A contented people have been driven into discontent and unrest. Imperial authorities are standing with cannon loaded to the muzzle to sweep the streets at the first sign of disturbance. But the Finlanders are going to give them no such excuse. They are not given to armed revolution. It would be useless. The military martinet will waken in Russia some morning to find the dreaded revolution has come

elsewhere than here. It may take time, but it will come, unless a wise Alexander or Nicholas arises, liberal enough to meet the demand for constitutional government. When every university in that vast empire had to be closed to avoid riots it is significant of more than a passing storm."

A Great Fire in St. John. On the afternoon of Thursday last St. John was visited by the most destructive fire which

occurred in the city since the great fire of 1877. The scene of Thursday's conflagration was that part of the north end of the city known as Indiantown. The fire started shortly after one o'clock at the foot of the hill near the wharves in the building adjoining P. Nase & Sons' warehouse. A fresh southwest breeze was blowing, and before any effective force from the fire department had reached the place the fire had spread from building to building and assumed alarming proportions. Fanned by an increasing wind and favored by the dry condition of the wooden structures, the fire spread with great rapidity, consuming the warehouses along the waterfront and making its way up Main Street and along the streets to the north of that principal avenue of traffic and travel. By half past five o'clock the fire had reached the top of the hill on Main Street and on the parallel streets north of Main had extended considerably farther in the same direction. Favoring conditions of wind, and the fact that a large brick building had been reached on Main street, enabled the firemen to check at this point the progress of the fire in that direction, and it soon appeared that the conflagration was in process of being subdued. In this there was great cause for thankfulness, for at one time it seemed probable that the fire would extend much farther along Main street and no one could tell where its progress would be arrested. For a time the Main Street Baptist church and the F. Baptist church on Victoria street were felt to be in considerable danger, but happily the progress of the devouring element was arrested while yet some distance away from those structures. As it is, the destruction of property is very large and will be severely felt by the people of the burned district. Not less than 240 houses, it is said, were burned, and \$500,000 is probably a low estimate for the value of property destroyed. Many of the buildings burned were dwelling houses, and the number of families who lost their homes, and many of them much of their household furniture, by the fire is said to be not less than 300. According to a statement which may be taken as approximately correct, the aggregate insurance on the destroyed property is a little over \$220,000. Two persons lost their lives during the progress of the fire. One of these was Miss Cunard, a lady of about 80 years of age, who, against the warnings of friends, appears to have remained in her house until escape was cut off, and the other was Mrs. Mowry, in whose case death is said to have resulted from excitement. Many of the families burned out were persons of small means, upon whom the loss will fall very heavily.

The Main Street Baptist congregation has suffered severely by the fire. Pastor Gordon reports that a large number of the burned out families are among his people, and they will require no little assistance to enable them to tide over their heavy misfortune without suffering. No doubt generous aid will be extended to those in need. The city council has voted \$2,500 for the immediate relief of the fire sufferers. The Bank of British North America has made a donation of \$1,000, other generous donations from private individuals are reported and the Women's Council is taking steps to supply clothing and other necessities. At a public meeting of citizens called by Mayor Sears for Monday afternoon it is expected that some systematic plan of relief will be decided upon.