



CONCERNING FINLAND.

BY

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I.—GENERAL REMARKS.

WHEN Finland was joined to Russia in 1809 the Emperor Alexander I. sanctioned Finland's former fundamental laws as her constitution. Thus our country was given an autonomy of its own, and at the same time united to Russia and declared to be an inseparable part of the Russian empire. This constitution included that Finland should have a separate legislation, jurisdiction, and administration, and that her constitution could not be altered without the consent of the Finnish Legislative Assembly. In accordance with this constitution Finland has been ruled 100 years. In 1810 and 1816 the Emperor repeated his solemn confirmation of the rights of Finland, saying that he for ever and in every part sanctioned the constitution and the laws he had given to Finland. The Manifesto in which Alexander I. promised the Finnish people these rights was put up in all churches in Finland.

These were the conditions under which we were united to the Russian empire. But in later years, as my readers know, Russia's politics as to Finland have changed. A strong party in the empire declines to allow that Finland should have an autonomy of her own, and proclaims that Russia's real interests demand the incorporating of our country with the empire. But if solemn promises and treaties of this kind were no longer respected, then indeed a modern community and all human intercourse would be impossible. When the Government herself tramples under her feet her own repeatedly given assurances, the majority of the people must think that they also, "when their real interests demand it," have the right to violate the laws of their country.

Russia's real interests do not demand that the Finnish constitution must be violated. Look at these hundred years during which Finland has been enjoying the rights of her constitution. Is not her inner development, her advanced enlightenment, and her good economical position, an honour for Russia? It is right, as the modern Russian politicians say, that Finland ought to carry one part of the military burden for both countries, but it is wrong to make her pay as great a contribution as Russia. Finland has nothing to do with Russia's foreign politics; but in case of a war, Finland, because of her natural position, would be the first to suffer. Russia has a rich soil with boundless cultivating possibilities; she has rich mines of all kinds. She could, in case of a war, comparatively soon recover, because of her own great resources. Finland, on the contrary, has a poor soil and scarcely any mines; her resources which could lead to national wealth are few, if any, and it would take her a long time to recover after the disasters of a war.

Hitherto Finland's finances, in spite of her poverty, have been looked after in such a way that she has offered sufficient safety as to loans from abroad. She has about 204 million francs in funds, her State forests are estimated at more than 317 million francs, railways 259 million francs, canals 25 millions, rolling equipment 90 millions, real estate 52 millions, public buildings about 167 millions; or, total:—

Funds	..	..	..	..	..	..	204	mill. fr.
Forests, real estate, etc.	..	..	..	..	..	..	369	..
Communications	..	..	..	..	..	..	374	..
Buildings	..	..	..	..	..	..	167	..
							<u>1,114</u>	..

Finland has also a network of excellent highways, more than 25,000 kilometres, valued at 250 mill. fr. The post shows the rapid development of the people. Since 1895 the number of letters sent has risen *four* times, the number of journals sent *eight* times, postcards *sixteen* times, book post *five* times; or, told in percentage, in 1895 there were for every inhabitant in Finland about 10 postal transmittances, and ten years later about 25. Analphabetism is almost unknown in Finland. The only dark corners are those parts of our country which have been close to the Russian influence and where thus the Greek Catholic religion prevails.

If Finland is made into a Russian province and deprived of her

constitutional rights as a Grand Duchy, this "province" could not of course give the same security in business transactions with foreign countries as she has hitherto been able to offer. The incorporating of Finland into Russia means for us economical, political, and social decline, because our country for hundreds of years already (when we belonged to Sweden) has been governed and administrated according to principles quite different to those which prevail in Russia.

These are the chief principles on which every political party in Finland agree, be they of different views in all other questions. In spite of the great disagreement between them, on this point they have been able to unite. But until 1906, when the women got the franchise, they had to do with politics only "behind the scenes." Still, our political misfortunes stirred them up, forced a great many women, who had hitherto never done anything of the kind, out among the people teaching and lecturing, and into meetings where political and social questions were discussed. Thus indirectly they came in contact with politics, although many of these same women, perhaps, would have denied that they were "Women's Rights" women. Through literature, lectures, and private propaganda, the women as a whole were instructed in the above-mentioned questions—they as well as the men. But their knowledge in inner politics and in the difficult social problems of our time was often less satisfying. And the greatest danger was that unfortunately the political parties were standing against each other very sharply, creating bitterness and antagonism in wide circles. This discouraged many women from interesting themselves in politics.

II.—WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN FINLAND.

This reform was introduced so suddenly that the majority of women had scarcely more than about two years to get ready for it. Already in 1884 the first Women's Rights Association in Finland (Finsk Kvinnoförening-Suomen Naisyhdistys) had it in their programme. But it did not interest the women as a whole; on the contrary, the proposal was laughed at and scorned. In 1897 the above-mentioned Association was fortunate enough to get three members in the Diet to introduce a Bill on women's suffrage, but it was not even sent to a Committee. Some lectures were held and some literature and articles in the papers published now and

then, but the women did not show any great interest in the question. Then in 1904 the universal suffrage for men came suddenly up to the surface, and that roused the women. From this year it must be admitted that the majority of women, old and young, learned and unlearned, of all religions and social views, became interested. Hundreds of meetings were held, and the women very decidedly showed that they wanted suffrage. As a peculiarity it may be mentioned that the majority of women wished eligibility for women into the Diet, and also suffrage and eligibility for married women.

When the law was sanctioned by the Czar in July, 1906, and came into operation on the 1st of October of the same year, many women—especially the religious—were frightened. They found that they were not prepared. Associations of all kinds then (from October until March 15th, 1907) arranged lectures on the new law and the significance of the ballot, and had mock elections, where the women learned how to vote. These meetings were held everywhere in the country. I think I can say that no one—not even the poorest woman living in the forest districts—needed to be without knowledge. But, alas! our political position had been such that it had not given the people as a whole sufficient opportunities to understand political and social questions, and the women had only recently for the first time been invited to join political parties and pronounce their opinion. The result of the first elections in March, 1907, was pretty good. Unfortunately there are no official statistics concerning the number of women voters at that election. But some details published in the papers give us the right to think that the number was high. I will put down some examples :—

Place.	Number of Voters.		Place.	Number of Voters.	
	Men.	Women.		Men.	Women.
Helsingfors ..	12,684	16,900	Björneborg ..	2,333	3,956
Ekenäs ..	388	614	Miehikkälä ..	812	699
Tevastehus ..	756	1,122	Virolahti ..	1,696	1,650
Joensuu ..	1,045	560	Wehmaskylä ..	181	123
Willmanstrand	336	389	Kuusankoski ..	280	267
Nystad ..	428	696	Kuusanniemi ..	92	94
Hangö ..	731	839	Kouvola ..	276	224
Heinola ..	214	295			

Nineteen women were elected. The following year—the Diet being dissolved by the Czar—the general interest for the elections

had decreased and great dejection prevailed. The official statistics show that 416,373 men, or 68.9 per cent. of the male voters, and 410,194 women, or 60.3 per cent., partook in the elections. Of these there were—In the cities, 47,181 men, or 66.1 per cent., and 60,116 women, or 59.2 per cent.; in the rural districts—men, 369,192, or 69.3 per cent.; women, 341,078, or 60.6 per cent. These somewhat peculiar and uneven numbers depend on the fact that the majority of the voters are women, and thus a far larger part of them ought to have voted. The only part of the country where women and men voted in almost as great a percentage is the district of Wasa, where there was the percentage of 65.3 for men, and 65.9 for women.

The statistics for the following years show these numbers:—

Voters.	1909	1910	1911
Men	623,205	631,565	642,811
Women	681,888	693,316	707,237

Those who used their votes:—

Men	439,296	409,900	419,545
Women	412,755	386,682	387,504

Or, percentage:—

Men	70.5	64.9	65.2
Women	60.5	55.8	54.9

These numbers show that if the women wanted they could rule this country, because the women voters are in the majority; but women have not used their vote to the same extent as men—I would add, with the exception of the first elections. It is my firm belief that women then were in the majority, although there were no statistics about it—if on purpose or not I cannot say. And the reason why these first elections stirred up the women was that it was a great national question—the abolition of alcoholic drinks—which then mostly interested the great majority of women. Many infirm women—old, crippled, ignorant—went to the elections crying of joy “We have got the right to abolish the whisky.” Because of political and other reasons this hope failed, and when the women found that the Diet was dissolved every year and no abolition law could be expected in the near future their interest in the vote decreased. There may also be other reasons depending on our inner party politics—the difficulty for women voters to find suitable women candidates, and to get for them places to which they may really

be elected—all reasons depending on our little-developed political knowledge and the great political strain under which we have been living for many years.

As to the women in the Diet, 25 were elected in 1908, 21 in 1909, 17 in 1910, and 14 in 1911. It was a mistake that so few really able and suitable women for the work in the Diet were elected. Among the Social Democrats in 1908, out of thirteen women all (with the exception of one) were formerly servants, factory hands, or seamstresses. If we had women lawyers, merchants, physicians, scientists, and so on, women's words would have weighed more; they could have spoken with more authority. That I am right in this shows the experience of women's work in the Diet, since we got our lady factory inspector in there. She, together with a woman writer in history and a woman statistician, delivered a good battle against special labour legislation for women in the Diet of 1910.

I admit that there are difficulties, and will still be, for those women who sit in the Diet. But the facts show already that never before have so many questions vital for women been brought before the Diet as during these four years when we have had women members. Instead of having to meekly ask one male member after another to bring forward our petitions, we women decide upon it ourselves, and have them published in the records. Among those questions are the raising of the age of consent for girls, reform of the household schools, an increased number of midwives in rural parishes, the raising of the marriage age for girls from 15 to 17 years, the right for married women to possess property and be of age, greater rights for married women as to their children, the right for women to practise as lawyers, increased rights for women to hold State offices. Most of these questions are still in Committee or not handled at all, but it is a step forward to have had them brought before the law-makers.

When we get a sufficient number of able women suitable for Parliamentary work prepared to be candidates in the elections, when we get the women voters trained to understand the importance of partaking in the elections, when women will understand their right and duty not to vote for men who stand against their holiest interests in the Diet, then we will—no doubt of it—have still greater victories to mention. But in our troubled political conditions—conditions where we never know to-day what will be allowed or

prohibited to-morrow—it will, of course, take some time. This must always be remembered when the suffrage of women in Finland is discussed. We have seen it among men that the quiet pacific elements—those who prefer home life and their own affairs before restless politics—have more and more withdrawn from the elections and declined to be candidates. How much more so must be the case with women, who are newcomers in the field?

Still, I do not believe that any friend of women's suffrage thinks it has been a failure in our country. But we admit that under present conditions reform cannot ripen as soon as could be expected in countries with less turbulent politics and an older culture. One among the best examples proving that I am not standing alone in these views is the decision of the Church Congress in 1909 to recommend the equal vote on church and parish matters for men and women, and the motive mentioned was "the experience of women's work in the Diet."

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