

A Book of the Week.

"THROUGH FINLAND IN CARTS."*

THOSE who desire to provide themselves with a book which will wile away the hours of a long railway journey cannot do better than procure "Through Finland in Carts," by Mrs. Alec Tweedie. The ability of this talented and charming authoress is now well known, and, in this latest production she has certainly sustained, if not surpassed, her former reputation. The subject upon which she writes is a most novel and fascinating one, and as we read Mrs. Tweedie's vivid descriptions of her experiences, we feel that our education has hitherto been sadly neglected, our ignorance of Finland and its interesting people is appalling, and upon the very first opportunity we must certainly explore this *terra incognita* for ourselves.

Not the least attractive part of the book are the charming engravings with which it is profusely illustrated. As works of art they are all that can be desired, while they impress upon us still further the scenes described by Mrs. Tweedie's graphic pen. It will come as a surprise to most people to hear that "everyone bicycles in Finland." Somehow one has learnt to think of Finland in connection only with sleighs and snow-shoes. However, our minds are entirely disabused of such ideas, and we have to accept the fact that the Finnish summer may be shorter, but is much hotter while it lasts than our English one. The bicycles used are, for the most part, of English or American make, but we read—

"Although we supply the Finlanders with machines we might take a lesson from them in the matter of registration. At the back of every saddle in large figures was engraved the number, bought at the time of registration, for four marks (three shillings and fourpence); consequently, in case of accident or theft, the bicycle could immediately be identified; a protection alike for the bicyclist and the person to whom through reckless riding an accident is caused."

With regard to the national characteristics of the Finns, we learn

"They are a grave, serious people, who understand a joke even less than the Scotch, while such a thing as chaff is absolutely unintelligible to them. Life to the Finns seems a very serious matter, which can only be undertaken after grave thought, and much deliberation."

It also comes as a surprise to learn that

"Finland is riddled with telephones," and that they are "in constant use for every conceivable and inconceivable thing."

Of special interest to nurses is the description of the native baths:

"Every house in the country, however humble that house may be, boasts its *baster*, or bath house . . . easily recognisable; one of its walls, against which the stove stands, being usually black even on the outside, from smoke. Every Saturday, year in, year out, that stove is heated, and the whole family have a bath—not singly, oh dear, no, but altogether, men, women, and children; farmer, wife, brothers, sisters, labourers, friends, and the dogs too, if they have a mind; so that once in each week the entire population of Finland is clean, although few of them know what

daily ablutions, even of the most primitive kind, mean, while hot water is almost as difficult to procure in Suomi (Finland), as a great auk's egg in England. . . . In towns, such as Helsingfors, there are professional washers, who go from house to house to bathe and massage men and women alike. Theirs is a regular trade, and as the higher class of the profession receive about a shilling for 'attending' each bath given at a private house, the employment is not one to be despised. Neither is it, as proved by the fact that there are over 300 public bathing women in Finland."

Mrs. Tweedie and her sister courageously determined to take a bath in national fashion, and the vivid description given of this is most interesting and astounding.

"First, says Mrs. Tweedie, the washing woman threw a pail of water upon the great heated stones, placed for the purpose inside the stove, the steam ascended in volumes, and the temperature went up. . . . Almost stifled, we blinked, and gasped, and groaned by turns. . . . Much amused, *Saima*—who be it understood, was a Swedish-speaking Finn—stood smiling cheerfully at our discomfort; but, happily, at last she seemed to think we might have had enough. . . . A moment later, through the steam, we saw her smiling face ascending the stairs, with a pail of hot water in one hand, and a lump of soft soap in the other, on which was a large bundle of white fibre, something like hemp. Dipping this in the pail, she soon made a lather with the soap, and, taking up limb after limb, scrubbed us hard and long—scrubbed until our skin tingled, and in the damp mysterious heat we began to wonder how much of our bodies would emerge from the ordeal. . . . More water was thrown on the steaming bricks, and *Saima* retired, returning immediately with a great bundle of birch leaves, tied up with a string such as we had often seen her on former occasions sweeping the floors with. Dipping the branches of the birch into a pail of hot water she proceeded to beat us all over! She laughed, and we laughed; but the more we laughed the harder she thumped, till the sharp edges of the leaves left almost a sting, while the strong healthy *Saima* beat us harder and harder, dipping the leaves into hot water continually."

Nothing daunted by this heroic treatment, Mrs. Tweedie investigated personally the ant-baths and the waterfall-baths of the country, but of these it is impossible to give even a brief account.

The translation of *Kalewala*, the great Finnish epic poem, greatly resembling, in rhythm and construction, the "Song of Hiawatha," is so interesting that I should like to quote from it at length did space permit. The "New Woman" will scarcely appreciate the advice given therein to a husband, concerning a disobedient wife, to

"Instruct her with the willow,
Use the birch rod from the mountains."

The whole poem, however, is charming.

The chapter devoted to "Women and Education," will well repay careful study. It is full of interesting information and statistics, and could only have been compiled by one who was keenly interested in the woman question.

"Politically the position of Finland is difficult" (it is under Russian rule) "and as everything has to go before the Tsar, who would at once reject any laws sent up by women, the women rather hold back for the present, for fear of spoiling their chances later on. They have been patient, therefore, and only quietly worked for their franchise."

Finland is in advance of us, however, inasmuch as its University degrees are open to women, and "women have absolutely equal rights with men in the

* "Through Finland in Carts," by Mrs. Alec Tweedie. (London: Adam and Charles Black.)

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