

The Position of Women in Finland.

British women suffragists are indebted to the Women's Freedom League for the opportunity of hearing a woman Member of Parliament speak for the first time in this country. At the Queen's Hall on Friday, January 8th, Dr. Thekla Hultin, a member of the Finnish Diet, told how the vote was won and is used by the women of Finland, and Mme. Aino Malmberg, also a Finnish lady, spoke most convincingly.

Mrs. Billington Greig, who was in the chair, welcomed here in the land of rebellion those who have fought for and won liberty in their own country. In this country the problem had still to be solved, and the question of the moment for women was, "Would they be in the King's Speech?" Upon this depended the decision of peace or war.

The Chairman then called on Mme. Aino Malmberg, who was enthusiastically received. She said that the question was often asked: "How was the suffrage given to the women of Finland?" and the reply was always the same, "It was not given at all, we took it." But that after all was only partly true. A great help was that the men in Finland had the franchise in such a limited extent that they were able to understand the wrongs of the women. In 1899 there was a terrible turmoil in the national life of Finland, when, after long years of suffering, the outlook seemed hopeless, and the very existence of Finland as a nation threatened, but it was also a period of political awakening, during which the women proved that their work was of the same value as that of their brothers, and that without them the men could achieve nothing. The working classes also realised their own importance, and in 1905 a wave of freedom swept over the country, and the cry was: "Rather death than one day of slavery." Ultimately, by a bloodless revolution, every Finnish man and woman of 24 years of age (for the women's equal rights were always acknowledged) received their political rights. The abolition of sex disability was not questioned by any party, for during the unhappy years the men had had the practical experience which teaches more than centuries of easy living, and had learnt what it was to have many duties and very few rights. Now there was no political party in Finland which wished to diminish the rights of the women. Hard times might come again, perhaps very soon, but the

women were no longer in the position of children, and would prove a strength in the coming struggle.

Mrs. Despard, on behalf of the Women's Freedom League, then presented an address of welcome to Dr. Hultin, which had been illuminated by Miss Pocock, Hon. Secretary of the Working Branch.

Dr. Hultin, in a most interesting speech, said that in 1907, when women were first privileged to go to the poll, it would scarcely have been surprising if the majority who were uneducated women of the lower classes had not done so. So meetings were held, and it was explained to them that if they did not use their right it would be said that the women of Finland did not understand the value of what they had received. The Finnish women did their duty and crowded to the poll, and experience in two elections had shown further that there was no change in the strength of the respective political parties. Nineteen women were elected members of the Diet in 1907, and last September twenty-five, one-eighth of the whole number. There was no question of rivalry between the men and the women. They worked together for common ends. The women followed their party on questions of party, but united to obtain humanitarian reforms. They had presented petitions for the raising of the marriageable age from 15 to 17, the exemption of women from their husband's guardianship, the right of women to Government employment on the same terms as men, and the prevention of cruelty to children and animals, and all these had been accepted by the Diet.



Dr. THEKKA HULTIN.
Member of the Finnish Diet.

Lastly, Dr. Hultin said that the enfranchisement of the women of Finland was no act of Imperial grace, but part of the fundamental law of the country. If it happened that the franchise was taken from them all the world would know that an elemental law of Finland had been violated. Their autonomy was threatened by Russia, but they cherished the hope they would have the sympathy of the civilised world.

Need she say that England's struggle was marked with the greatest interest in Finland. She believed the women who had sacrificed liberty in furtherance of the movement would shortly gain their end. Their cause must succeed, because social evolution demanded it in the name of humanity and of justice.

Countess Russell and Mrs. Zangwill having spoken, Mrs. Despard proposed, and Miss Matters

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)