

ARE WE SUPREME IN AGRICULTURE ?

WANTED : A MAN AT THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

By PROFESSOR JAMES LONG.

ACCORDING to the official report on the Census of Production Act there are in Great Britain nearly 13,000,000 acres of rough grazing lands on mountain, down, and heath which are valued at 10s. to 12s. an acre, but which can by no method of calculations be placed at more than 2s. 6d. to 5s. A large portion of this land can be materially improved—judging by what has already been accomplished by a few able men—and enabled to feed five times the number of stock. However high we place the standard of our work we cannot regard our agricultural system as worthy of the British name so long as this enormous area—which is twice as large as the cultivated area of Denmark—remains in the condition in which it has probably existed for thousands of years. Successive Governments have failed to recognise the potential wealth which lies beneath it. Science has devoted her energies to the development of the cultivated soils; it has remained for a handful of practical men farmers to show the way to its reclamation, and if that way is followed time will add the length and breadth of a new kingdom to the productive acres of our land. We return to the solution of this question, however, later on.

The almost universal belief of the British agriculturist—under which term we designate both landlord and tenant—that British agriculture holds the supremacy of the world is erroneous and misplaced. Those who have travelled in other countries, and made themselves acquainted with the farmers who inhabit them, can testify to the truth of this assertion. This country long since acquired a reputation for the superior character of the stock which it produced, and which it continues to produce to-day. It has supplied the world with horses, cattle, sheep, and pigs—all, be it remembered, the very best of their kinds—and much as we lament our backwardness in other directions we cannot doubt the fact that they have been unequalled by the produce of any other country. We have had the advantage of attending agri-

cultural exhibitions in various Continental cities, in Canada, and the United States, but in no case have we found a single variety of the livestock of the farm which approaches the standard of perfection reached in the British Isles. The British farmer excels as a breeder of stock, and his practice has been closely followed wherever farming flourishes; but, if we except the United States, with only approximate success.

In America the livestock as a whole is chiefly derived from Great Britain. Taking, then, general purview of the livestock of the world, we arrive at the conclusion that we are an equal first in the race against Europe and America combined. This is no boast, it is simply a statement of fact. When we come to the actual produce of the soil, however, we tread upon different ground. In this department of the farm we have a reputation which we do not deserve; indeed, we have great reason to believe that we are beaten, although our apologists invariably insist that our average yield of wheat is superior to that grown in other countries.

When some years ago, owing to low prices, a large quantity of wheat land was laid down to grass, the area sown to wheat was considerably restricted. Naturally, the land best adapted to the crop was retained for continued cultivation, and in consequence the average yield increased. The fact that our average yield on a comparatively small area of land is larger than that of our greater neighbours is thus easily explained, for the rule is that the larger the area sown the smaller the average yield. It is for this reason that our average of 31·7 bushels is beaten by Belgium with 35·8 bushels, by Holland with 34½ bushels, by Switzerland with 33½ bushels, and by Denmark, which produced 42 bushels in the last year recorded—1907. The much smaller yield in other European countries is owing to the extensive area under cultivation. Thus in France wheat covers 16,000,000 acres, in Italy 11,500,000, in European Russia 47,000,000, in Spain 9,000,000, and in Austria-Hungary 12,000,000 acres. Germany, however, with an average of 4⅔ million acres under cultivation,

are generally impressed in the same way by the prevailing opinions and ideas of their environment and generation.

It has been asserted in some foreign newspapers that the great and unexpected success of the Social-Democratic Party after the suffrage reform in Finland is the result of the introduction of woman suffrage; but an investigation has been made by two members of the Diet, who by statistics prove that the presumption is quite unfounded. The success of the Social-Democratic Party has its only and very natural explanation in the introduction of universal suffrage, and because of certain social conditions.

Every citizen in Finland of 24 years is entitled to vote, and is also eligible as a member of the Diet. It was natural that this privilege should spur on the women to nominate candidates of their own sex for the purpose of bringing forward their especial wants in the Diet. But the women voters never had a thought of carrying their demands through parliament by a majority of women representatives. They had common-sense enough to admit that men until now, by education and profession, are generally more trained for legislative work than women. Besides, they felt assured that even a smaller number of women, when taking part personally in legislation, could easily convince men of the justice of their demands. Proportionately few women, too, have been willing to undertake the responsible task of law-making. The number of women M.P.'s has varied in the different elections, being now 14, or 7 per cent. of the whole. Most of them have been re-elected several times by their parties, and not only by the votes of women, but also of men. Some have been obliged to resign on account of health or other personal reasons.

In comparison with the whole number of representatives, 200, the number of women M.P.'s is small, but the result gained by Finnish women is still the greatest achievement in any country where women are eligible as members of parliament.

Many people wonder what the women do in the Finnish Diet. I cannot find any better answer than this: exactly the same as the men. They serve on the numerous parliamentary committees, and not only committees dealing with moral and social questions, but also with common as well as fundamental law, labour, commerce, communications, finance, etc. They take part in the discussions and endeavour in every way honestly to fulfil their duties. As there is co-operation on every question, it is impossible to

specify exactly what is done by women and what by men. Women, whose experience of parliamentary life is limited to only six years, do not expect to be compared with veterans in legislation, but I think that I shall not lay myself open to contradiction when I say that the general standard of capacity of the new elements brought in by the franchise reform is as high among women as among men. Statistics have proved that women attend the sittings more regularly and—what, perhaps, is surprising—speak less than men. Good comradeship and mutual confidence are the prevailing features of the relations between men and women while working together in the Diet.

The women representatives have considered it their especial duty to work for the improvement of the position of woman in legal and economic respects. Many proposals brought in by them have had a humanitarian purpose or aimed at the improvement of moral and social life. Besides, they have not lacked interest in the great political questions of their country. It is clear that the Bills introduced by women, as they are in a minority, can only be passed by the support of men, but the knowledge that the women are backed by a numerous class of voters causes their proposals to be regarded far more seriously than formerly.

It must be remembered that the Finnish Diet, after the introduction of the suffrage reform, has been working in an extremely difficult political situation. During six years it has been dissolved four times, and five elections have taken place. The Diet has been obliged to use much valuable time during its short sessions for the defence of the constitutional rights of the people, on which question all parties in Finland are unanimous. Many of the Bills passed by the Diet have not been sanctioned or have been set aside. In fact, the present Russo-Finnish conflict has paralysed all sound development in the country. All this is to be considered when estimating the work of the Diet as well as that of its women members. The most important effect of the introduction of universal suffrage is, however, that all classes of the people, men and women, now perfectly realise that the welfare of the nation depends, in the first place, upon the maintenance of its self-government.

From a comparison of my experience of parliamentary life in Finland with observations made during my visit to England, I see no reason why woman suffrage in this country should not work as well as in Finland, and even better, because of the absence here of the political complications with which Finland is faced.