

WHERE WOMEN HAVE THE VOTE AND MORE.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN'S FRANCHISE IN FINLAND.

By DR. TEKLA HULTIN, M.P.

THE question of woman suffrage, which in this country is still being debated, was settled in Finland in 1906 by a law introducing universal suffrage for men and women on equal terms. This reform was due to a spontaneous political demonstration of public opinion in 1905, in which the whole Finnish people took part. It would not, however, be correct to consider the Finnish women's political enfranchisement as the casual production of a sudden movement or of a revolution, as it has sometimes been called. The fact is, that the way for this reform was prepared long before, partly by public discussion, but principally by the fact that for a long time widespread co-operation between women and men had existed in social and, during the hard years of 1899-1905, even in political work. Women's suffrage was generally looked upon as the natural consequence of granting suffrage to all men, and it was publicly declared to be a reward for the patriotism which the women had shown in times of general oppression. It is further to be noted that the Finnish Parliament or Diet, as it is called, which in 1906 passed the reform, was at that time a class representation of mediæval type, which Finland had inherited from its union with Sweden from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. In that assembly, consisting of the representatives of the nobility, the clergy, the burghers or citizens of the towns, and the peasantry, not a single voice was raised against the proposal to include women in the universal suffrage. The Finnish women thus escaped the painful necessity of hearing men debate the question whether "woman's predestination" permitted her to drop a voting paper into a ballot box. Nor was any fear expressed that the vote would unsex women or produce a general sex-war. The same law which introduced the universal suffrage changed thoroughly the form of representation; instead of four orders or estates, each meeting separately, the country was to be represented by one chamber consisting of two hundred members.

As to the question so often asked: "How far

have women used their right of voting?" I consider that the Finnish women have done their duty. They have crowded to the polls in nearly as large numbers as the men. Out of all the women inscribed on the voting register, 54·8-60·5 per cent. have taken part in the last four elections, while the percentages of the male voters varied between 64·9 and 70·5. The presumption that women are devoid of political interest has thus been disproved.

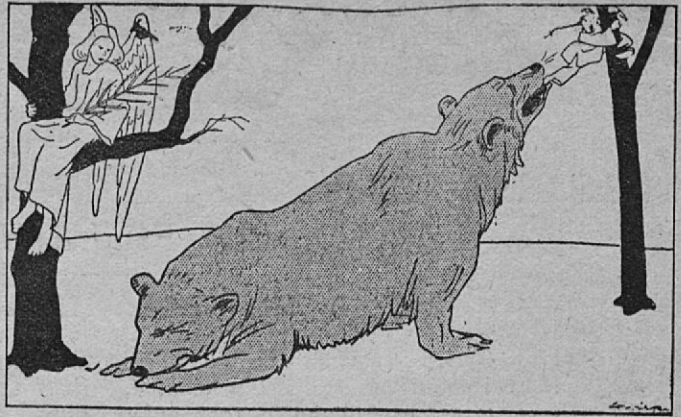
Opponents of women's suffrage often express the fear that all women electors might form a block, which by their majority of votes, as there are more women than men in most countries, could dominate the elections. At any rate in Finland this fear has shown itself quite unfounded. Women voters, although there are about 60,000 more than men on the voting registers, have not used their majority to secure power for themselves. In fact, there has been no question at all of forming a block or any special Woman's Party. Such an idea would seem absurd to the Finnish mind, as being both against nature and common-sense. In Finland the male and female electors do not form two rival armies. Co-operation has existed in all the political parties between men and women.

Women's suffrage is also often opposed on purely practical grounds, the different political parties fearing that women will join their opponents. The Conservatives are afraid that women, led away by their impulsive temperament, will vote Radical; while in the Liberal and Radical camps it is supposed that because of their stronger religious tendency, they will become a Conservative asset. In Finland the experience of five elections has confirmed neither of these contradictory predictions. The Finnish women have voted for the various existing political parties in quite the same proportion as the men. The granting of woman's suffrage has caused no change in the proportional strength of the respective political parties. This is the general opinion in Finland. Such an effort ought not to surprise any social observer, who knows that men and women of the same standard of life

Russia's political influence increases.

BRITISH HONOUR INVOLVED.

After all, was the *Entente* of 1907, which has brought great material loss to England and which offers no guarantee for the safety of India, really necessary and worth the sacrifices it has cost? Professor Vambéry doubts whether the revolutionary tendencies in India are so dangerous as people suppose, though he admits that recent events in Asia show that the power of the Christian West is less feared than it was. But granting British power in India to be seriously threatened, would Russia hasten to the side of her ally? Besides the material sacrifices, which will tend to increase year by year, England has suffered great moral harm by the *entente* with Russia, the enemy of Islam. In the eyes of Islam, England was regarded as the protector and friend of the Mahommedans,



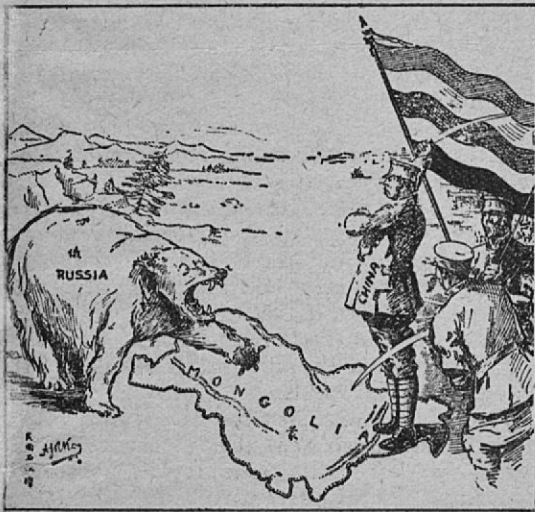
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The Two Heads of the Russian Bear.

In front he bows down. Behind he swallows.

but her policy in Persia has shattered that idea. Even if the *rapprochement* with Russia could be approved of from the European standpoint, there are points in the agreement which are most unfair to England. Most conspicuous is the inequality in the division of the spheres of influence, by which a tiny, insignificant arid region of Persia has fallen to the English, while Russia has kept for herself not only the richest and most populated region, but one five times as large as the British. As to the neutral zone, no one knows why it should exist. In her Persian policy England has not been influenced by Russophobia or Germanophobia; her decision is due to a growing enervation of her national energy, perseverance, and strength. The number of wonderful men, whose heroism, patriotism, and humanism have made England great, is unhappily on the decline, and to this decline of the original strength of the British people alone is the subservience to Russia in the domain of Persian policy to be attributed. This phenomenon is greatly to be regretted, for not so easily does a Power in Europe arise with such a genius as that of the British for spreading modern civilisation in Asia and elsewhere.



[Min-kuo-hsi-pao.]

[Shanghai.]

The Mongolia Situation.