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Poet of Finland

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BY

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RUNEBERG, THE POET OF FINLAND

By E. HOWARD HARRIS, M.A.

FINLAND in recent years has come within the scope of the tourist trade, and quite a number of English folk have visited that fascinating country, which has been described with numerical inaccuracy as the land of a thousand lakes. They have come back, I feel sure, with rich memories of the beautiful scenery, the lure of the wide expanses of wood and water, the thrill, perhaps, of shooting the rapids in the Ulea river, the roar of the cataract of Imatra and the fascination of Finnish sunsets in the autumn or the white nights in the early summer. They will have found an intelligent, industrious and hospitable people with a strenuous and honourable history, and perhaps, if they have inquired deeper, a people who, while they are at least in the towns as progressive as modern Americans, have still a vast legend lore that links them with the elemental past.

For the purpose of this paper, however, it is but necessary to remember that there are in Finland in reality two nations, just as there are two Irelands and, may I say it, two Welsh nations. On the one hand there is the Swedish-speaking Finlander—politically called the Svekoman, and on the other the Finnish-speaking Finn—the Fennoman, and between them no love lost. One bridge, however, unites them, and that is the poet Runeberg. The Svekoman and the Fennoman may rage at each other across the Alexandergatan in Helsinki, or Helsingfors as the former calls it, but they both unite in singing Runeberg's national song "Vårt Land" at the foot of his statue in the gardens of the capital.

In recent years a considerable literature has arisen in the Finnish tongue, but when Runeberg was a

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young man, Lönnrot was only beginning to collect the folk material from which he welded later the loose epic of the *Kalevala*. The culture of Finland was almost entirely in the hands of the Swedish-speaking Finlander, and Finnish was at the time only a "kitchen" speech. Nevertheless, the Swedish-Finn and the Finnish-Finn were even then united in the field of history. Their common enemy was the Russian, and their blood mingled together in defence of a land beloved by both of them. This was the period of the Great Northern War when "Punaparte", as the Finns called him, was the menace of Europe. He had offered Finland to the Czar as compensation for aid against England, and soon the country was conquered in spite of the amazing bravery of its people. The fact, therefore, that from a Swedish voice came the clarion notes of Finnish patriotism, and from a Swedish pen the most charming and truthful delineations of Finnish life, accounts for the veneration felt for Runeberg by all in his own land.

Johan Ludvig Runeberg was born at Jacobstad on the 5th of February, 1804. His family was of pure Swedish extraction but long domiciled in Finland. His father was a sea-captain, and the future poet was the eldest of six children. Probably through straitened circumstances, he was sent to Uleaborg to be brought up by an uncle, but at the college in Wasa he was only able to get his education by teaching the children of more well-to-do parents. He managed, however, to get to the University of Åbo, and by studious toil he took the degree of *candidat* and finally Doctor of Philosophy at that University. On leaving it, he had to think about getting a living, and he therefore accepted a tutorship in a family living in one of the most romantic and wild parts of the country—the remote and beautiful parish, as he calls it, of Saarijarvi. This sojourn was as epoch-making for him as the Italian journey of

Chaucer or perhaps, more appropriately, the travels of Longfellow in the countries of the Baltic. Here the foundations of his future greatness were laid. The wild and fascinating solitudes, the struggling existence of the people, their brave and enduring character, their primitive domestic life and pure morality made a deep impression on his mind. In the household was an old pensioner who had fought through the war, and there is no doubt that he made him, in part, the Ensign Stål whose stories he was to tell with such force and felicity later on. In the seclusion of this parish he wrote the first instalment of his *Lyrical Songs, Idylls and Epigrams*, and prepared the manuscript of his first book, *The Elk Hunters*.

In 1827 the city of Åbo was devastated by fire, caused by tallow carelessly ignited by a serving woman. The cathedral first suffered, but soon the wooden buildings of the University were destroyed. This catastrophe led to the removal of the University to Helsingfors and, incidentally, to Runeberg's return to the capital. He was offered and accepted the post of amanuensis to its Consistory, and when engaged in these duties he wrote in Latin a brilliant comparative study of the Medeas of Seneca and Euripides, and was soon appointed Docent in Roman Literature at the University.

He sent a copy of his *Lyrical Poems* to Bishop Franzen, who was one of the leading poets of Finland at that time, and the reply received was as follows: "When your charming present arrived I was prevented by official duties from bestowing on it a careful study. I had only time to rejoice here and there in the sight of a violet or the sound of a lark, but even then I learned that a real poet was making an appearance in my country. Now I have read deeper and know that it is a great poet that Finland is about to produce in you."

It was a generous and, moreover, a true prophecy.

In 1831 Runeberg married the niece of Archbishop Tengstrom of Abo. They had met at a party when he was a student, and she was one of the young ladies who, suspecting his poetic inclinations, had proposed that as his forfeit he should compose a Hymn to the Sun. This was done, and a local editor who was present printed the first effusion of Runeberg in his paper. Fredrika Charlotte Tengstrom was a woman of high mental endowments and fine qualities of heart, and she made the poet a congenial companion and a devoted wife.

In the year of his marriage he had submitted to the Swedish Academy his poem *The Grave in Perrho*. It was the story in verse of a grave in the wilds of Finland—the grave of an old man and his six tall sons, and related with rich severity of style the circumstances that laid them there. It was a kind of trial trip into the tragic history of his country. The Academy, however, only gave him the award of mediocre merit—the small gold medal. They were accustomed to the embellished affectations of Tegner's verse, and as little understood Runeberg's restraint and merit as the *Edinburgh Review* understood the poets of the Romantic Revival in England. The poem was against the rules.

In 1832 he became the editor of the *Helsingfors Morgonblad*, and in it many of his poems appeared.

But he now collected the material he had amassed in the wilds of Finland, and there soon appeared his first masterpiece *The Elk Hunters*. This is a truly national picture of his country. It is ranked by critics next to the *Kalevala*.

In 1837 he had undoubtedly been reading *Hermann and Dorothea*, without losing the spell of his northern sojourn. The result was Finland from a romantic angle—the exquisite idyll *Hanna*. Without underrating his greater works, I confess an affection for

Hanna—beautiful as the story of Ruth, or, to give a Northern parallel, the peasant tales of Bjornson.

This year he removed to his final home Borgå, a beautiful town on a fjord-like inlet some thirty miles from Helsingfors. He had accepted a Lectorat on Roman Literature in the Gymnasium there. The quietness of this quaint little place was good for Runeberg for it drove his mind inward, and gave creative strength and solidity of execution.

Borgå is a place of pilgrimage. Runeberg is met at every corner just as Shakespeare is encountered in Stratford. Here I visited his house, now a show place. It reminded me somewhat of Dove Cottage, Grasmere, in its arcadian simplicity, but there was an academic refinement in the rooms which revealed that the owner was a scholar as well as a poet. After his death the Government purchased it for the nation. Literary shrines that have been commercialised do not usually appeal to me, but this one did. One might almost expect to see Runeberg himself step out to greet you. For fifteen years of his life the poet was stricken with paralysis and confined to a portion of the house; but before that *Nadescha* and *Christmas Eve* and his three greatest poems *Kung Fjalar*, *Ensign Stals Sanger* and the *Kings at Salamis* had been sent forth from that wooden villa, through the windows of which a genius looked out upon the world. In it you may see the medals of the Swedish Academy which he had gained, the loving cup sent to him by the veterans of the Finnish Army, and the tankard presented to him by the students of Upsala.

Runeberg died in this house in his seventy-fourth year.

There is one other literary shrine in Finland associated with Runeberg, and that is the little summer-house on the Hog's Back (Punkaharju), one of the ridges in the heart of the country from which there is

an enchanting scene. Here the poet wrote his famous song *Our Land*.

The life of a poet, although of romantic interest and in many cases with a vital relationship to his works is, however, no substitute for them, and I shall now attempt to give you some glimpses of his stately and beautiful verse. In contradistinction to the Finnish and Estonian, however, these are not all sealed books.

My first acquaintance with Runeberg is due to one whose memory is forever fragrant to me—the Icelander, Eriker Magnússon. He had nearly completed the translation of *King Fjalar* when, as a young man, I met him. Before that, in conjunction with Professor Palmer, he had rendered with care and scholarship and some measure of felicity the *Lyrical Songs* of Runeberg. Fired by his contagious interest, I later found the fine essay of Edmund Gosse—the best existing sketch of Runeberg. To this I cannot too strongly express my indebtedness. I have also read the translations of Miss Anna Krook of Helsingfors, and those of the Scandinavian-American foundation, but in my judgment no one has caught the aroma of these poems as well as Gosse—in whom is the rare combination of poet and critic. The Swedish tongue is particularly sonorous, and as he says, it has compact masses of rolling sound. The hexameter can be negotiated in it much more successfully than in English. Moreover, there is an evanescent fragrance in Runeberg's verses that is very difficult to catch. That Edmund Gosse did it so well makes it more regretful that his versions are so few.

The first great poem of Runeberg is *Elgskytterne*, or *The Elk Hunters*. The story is simplicity itself. Petrus, a worthy farmer, is bidden to an elk hunt and is half-sleepily furbishing his gun, and listening to the chatter of his managing wife, Anna, busied about the household duties. The door opens and Anna's brother,

Matthias, a rich farmer, comes in unexpectedly. Anna tells her widower-brother that he ought to marry again for the sake of his young children, and suggests that Hedda, the parish beauty, would be a suitable match. Matthias will meet her after the hunt the next day. In the house is a beggar Aron, who was once well-off but has been ruined by bad harvests, and Petrus with true Finnish hospitality is entertaining him. In the ringing frosty morning the men set out for the hunt and Petrus gives his brother-in-law an old Swedish rifle, the romantic history of which is vividly described. They arrive at the rendezvous and there is a perfect picture gallery of portraits reminiscent of Chaucer's pilgrims. There Matthias encounters the rich Zacharius and his lovely daughter Hedda. In the company are some Russian pedlars from Archangel, and one of them, the brown-bearded Ontrus, takes out of his wares from his pack and invites the company to purchase. Matthias buys the best for Hedda. These pedlars do not participate in the hunt itself, and the horseplay with the girls left behind is described with inimitable drollery. Meanwhile Matthias proceeds across the snow dreaming of the beauty of Hedda. Four elks are shot, two by the old Swedish rifle, and the hunters return. Matthias seeks the father of Hedda for permission to woo her, and sets out to do so, when an abominable old woman Rebecca butts in and spoils it for the time. Now Petrus becomes the John of this Finnish version of the Miles Standish story, and goes to Hedda to press the suit of Matthias. He returns successful and the betrothal is celebrated. Before the ceremony the beggar Aron tells the tragic story of his life.

All very simple you say. That is true, but it is artistic simplicity, not simpleness. It is a fine picture of Finnish life. You see the varying scenes with crystal clearness, and feel the naïve simplicity, the sympathetic good nature, the honest love, the harmless parish

politics of an inland village. The epithets are simple and graphic. Anna, with a will and a temper of her own, is the manifold-word-knowing Anna; Petrus is the thoroughly sensible Petrus; the unkempt Russian huckster is the matted-brown-bearded Ontrus. The classical hexameter was never put to better use in modern literature. The truth is, the whole thing is Homer in homespun.

After this picture of life in the deep forests Runeberg turned to the Finnish parsonage. The Lutheran pastor is often a delightful person, and his home a haunt of ancient peace and a rural centre of refinement and culture. In this poem *Hanna* we see him smoking his pipe and contemplating the hazy landscape. It is a beautiful summer day, and he is glad because his son has passed his examination at the University of Åbo. Accordingly the youth will bring a poor fellow-student with him to spend the vacation. In another room is Hanna, the pastor's daughter, weaving not only threads for a garment but perhaps dreams of a lover. The old housekeeper comes in and tells her to dress quickly as the Bailiff, a man of fifty—rich and respected—is coming to visit her father. The pastor desires the match, and for the nonce Hanna is not displeased at the prospect of being the grand dame of the district. Shyly, however, she clings to the old housekeeper and finally they give her time to think it over. A girl friend becomes her confidant, and advises her to wait for another and younger Prince Charming. Suddenly her brother and his friend arrive, and to the surprise of the pastor, he finds that the friend is the son of a poet who was his bosom companion at college and had died early. They are all delighted for the youth is handsome and ingenuous. Then Hanna comes. Her appearance is described in these words, which give you an impression of the delicacy and charm of Runeberg's beautiful idyll:

Blushing she stood at the door, in the exquisite charm of her shyness,
 Coy as a strip of the sea that is caught by the rush of the morning,
 Slender and quivering in rosy dismay through the gloom of the woodlands.

It is love at first sight. The old pastor desires that Hanna and the visitor shall embrace as brother and sister, and the girl kisses him lightly on the forehead, and like the summer zephyr disappears to think it all over.

So thought she to herself, and her thoughts were less words than a perfume.

Later the brother suggests that they should go down to the lakeside for a walk, and here you get some exquisite verses about Finnish scenery.

"Look at the lake in the sunset," he answered; "look you, how unlike
 'Tis to the sea as it moans round the rock-built shores of your childhood!
 Here there are verdure and colour and life; quaint numberless islands
 Shoot from the breast of the wave, and, gracefully swaying on each one,
 Clumps of underwood there to the weary-worn sailor give shadow.
 Follow me down to the beach, calm strip between meadow and water,
 Here you may glance o'er wider expanses, discerning the hamlet
 Dimly sequestered afar, and the steeple that shines in the distance."

Their talk as they proceed reveals the poetic chivalry of the friend, and the tenderness of Hanna's nature; and at last the brother confides to them both that he is betrothed to the sister of his friend. They all sit in the magic twilight and, as Runeberg puts it, Hanna and the young student, "obedient to a sovran impulse", fall into each other's arms. The brother is delighted, and all three return home to ask the consent of Hanna's father, which, though he is surprised and somewhat disappointed, he gives at last with a good grace.

Sentimental you say, and an echo of Runeberg's reading of *Hermann and Dorothea*. Perhaps so. It must be admitted that the poet did not often unbend like this. But the delicate restraint of this charming poem, the melody, colour and compelling sweetness of it all, make it a gem of Finnish poetry.

Longfellow could write the pathetic and fragrant tale of *Evangeline*, but he did not possess the economy of speech or felicity of phrase that could produce so perfect a poem as *Hanna*.

In this connection, perhaps, it would be appropriate to speak of those *Lyrical Songs, Idylls and Epigrams* which were so carefully and strictly rendered by Magnusson and Palmer. They deal with all kind of themes, but the general notes are of nature and of love. The birds, the summer night, the simple joys and sorrows of the peasant, the memories of childhood, of middle age and old age, all are there—sweetness and light—sweetness and strength. There is something Wordsworthian in the nature poems, and something of a more scholarly Burns in the love-lyrics. Runeberg has also a quick eye for the dramatic situation, and he can often catch in a few words a cameo of life like Petöfi, though not with quite the concentration of the Hungarian. Here is an example :

THE BIRD-CATCHER

I walk along the woodland ways,
And up in fir and pine I gaze,
And oft enough the birds I see,
But none fly near to me.

They all appear to fly away
Where'er my trays I chance to lay,
And empty-handed, as I come,
I have to wend towards home.

I ought to see with grief and dread
How badly has my fowling sped,
But let it fail me as it will,
I am contented still.

One snare, I still have left behind,
 I never yet did empty find,
 As glad the bird for it will make,
 As I the same shall take.

And when, to-night, my home is made,
 For that bird my trap be laid,
 That bird's name is my girl—my lap
 Is that bird's very trap.

In the *Spring Ditty* he is as joyous as Tennyson.

They're coming, they're coming,
 The winged crowds that erst from us flew,
 To groves, that are blooming,
 To lakes, that are thawing anew.

Where storm-winds were flying,
 Sounds song now, melodious and sweet;
 Where snow-drifts were lying,
 Have gladness and beauty their seat.

'Tis but love arrests here
 From clouds'-tracts the fugitive band,
 And heaven's own guests here
 Seek only a bright-smiling land.

My heart shall be blooming,
 My feelings be thawing anew,
 Mayhap, they are coming,
 The angels, that erst from me flew.

Runeberg can concentrate thought, however, in epigrammatic form with great success.

GRIEF AND JOY

Grief and joy together
 In my heart abided,
 Grief within one chamber,
 Joy within the other,
 Both unreconcilèd.
 Now the one bore sway there,
 Now the other wholly.
 Since the one love came there,
 She the door has opened,
 And the twain appeasèd,
 For my grief is bliss now,
 And my joy is sadness.

There are two pictures of typical Finlanders in this book that illustrate the objectivity and realism of his style in the *Idylls*. There is the tale of the poor peasant Paavo, the victim of bad harvests, who struggles on in spite of the reproaches of his wife. Finally a good one

comes and the couple give thanks for their good fortune. They had been obliged to mix bark with their bread till that happy time.

Then fell Paavo on his knee, and spake thus :
 "Aye, the Lord but trieth, not forsaketh."
 And his mate fell on her knees, and spake thus :
 "Aye, the Lord but trieth, not forsaketh."
 But with gladness spoke she to the old man :
 "Paavo, joyful to the scythe betake thee !
 Now 'tis time for happy days and merry.
 Now 'tis time to cast the bark away, and
 Bake our bread henceforth of rye entirely."
 Paavo took the good-wife's hand, and spake thus :
 "Woman, he endureth trials only,
 Who a needy neighbour ne'er forsaketh;
 Mix thou in the bread a half of bark still,
 For all frost-nipped stands our neighbour's cornfield."

And then there is the droll story of the brawny Tavastlander, who challenged any one to "hold" him. How he is vanquished is told by Runeberg thus :

But affrighted stood the village lads there,
 Silent in the presence of the proud one;
 And not one of them stepped out towards him.

And with wonder and with love were gazing
 All the maidens on the stout young hero,
 For he stood, the sturdy Ojan Paavo,
 Like a pine-tree towering o'er the brushwood,
 And his eye like heaven's star was flaming,
 And his brow as clear as day was shining,
 And his yellow hair fell o'er his shoulder,
 As cascades fall sunlit down a mountain.

From the crowd of women out stepped Anna,
 She, the fairest of the village maidens,
 Lovely, as a morning is to gaze at.
 And she stepped out swift to Ojan Paavo,
 Threw around his neck her arms so supple,
 Placed her heart unto his heart quite closely,
 And, his cheek against her own cheek pressing,
 Bade him tear himself from her away then.
 And the sturdy fellow stood there vanquished,
 From the place he could not stir or struggle,
 But said, giving in, unto the maiden :
 "Anna, Anna ! I have lost my wager.
 Thou may'st straightway take my wealthy homestead,
 Thou may'st win also my silver treasures,
 Thou may'st own my many herds of cattle,
 And thine own I am with soul and body."

In *Christmas Eve* Runeberg gives us another picture of rural Finland, not in the farmer's humble home, but in the manor house. It is not as good a tale as the *Elk Hunters*, though there is deeper insight and more dramatic tact in parts. You feel, however, that on the whole the poet was more successful in the wooden sitting-room of Petrus than in the hall of the Major.

Runeberg was now finally settled in Borgå, and in 1842 he accepted the Chair of Greek at the College. This soon bore fruit, for in 1844 he reached the zenith of his powers in the tragic epic *Kung Fjalar*. There is, as Gosse remarks, an audacity and originality about it that raises it to the first order of lyrical beauty. The plot is as follows:

A mythical King—Fjalar—has won peace for his land after years of fighting. He is, like Nebuchadnezzar, proud of his creation, and swears that by his own power he will bring wealth and happiness to his land. As he utters his oath an unknown stranger enters, and uncovers his face. It is Darga—the seer who hates Fjalar. He is like the Druid who curses Edward I in Gray's poem *The Bard* transported to the laconic North. The curse is a terrible one that because Fjalar had defied Fate and the gods, he shall live to see his only daughter locked in the burning embraces of his only son. There is consternation in Fjalar's hall. The King, when he has recovered his speech, orders the nurse to bring Hjalmar and Gerda, his infant children, and holding one babe in each arm is swept with doubt as to which to sacrifice. His warriors persuade him to keep the boy, and one of them takes Gerda from the King's arms, and flings her "a laughing sacrifice" into the roaring sea. The next canto is twenty years later. In some mythical Ossianic country the three sons of the King are in love with Oihonna—a waif of the sea. She will not choose any of them because she is in love with a hero she has only heard of—the Viking Hjalmar—

whose prowess is noised abroad in the world. Morannel, her foster-father, tells her the story of her rescue from the sea, and her adoption by him. But Hjalmar, her unknown brother, is approaching, and there is a titanic fight in which Morannel dies in the arms of Oihonna. Fjalar in his land, oblivious of all this, rejoices in his pride and neither knows nor cares where Hjalmar is, as long as he has beaten the gods, and warded off the curse. Then Darga appears and tells him that the hour of vengeance has arrived! Hjalmar's dragon ship touches the shore, and he steps on the beach with a bloody sword. He explains to Fjalar that he has made Oihonna his bride unwittingly, and now that he has discovered the truth he has slain her, and then he slays himself before his father's throne. The sun is going down as the scene is enacted, and when they turn to Fjalar, he is dead. The gods are triumphant

This terrible theme is handled with a mastery that completely banishes aversion. The severity of the style is wonderful. Very rarely have sculpture and poetry kissed each other as in this poem. To enhance its beauty, and not to disturb its gravity there are in the Ossianic songs interspersed most delicate, lyrical passages, as if Celtic passion had been reduced from a nebula to a star, or to adopt Coleridge's expression about the Alpine glaciers, the billows of feeling had stiffened and found rest. The poem, as Gosse says, is like a noble frieze in marble. It is almost too terrifying to translate, but the following will give some idea of the Ossianic strain. Gael woos Oihonna in these words:

Come, Oihonna, follow my life'
The hunter loves thee, rosy cloud!
The tall prince of the mountains
Prays thee to share his upland footways.

Hast thou seen from thy mountain rocks
 The broad expanses smile in the morning?
 Hast thou seen the wakening sunrise
 Drink the dew of the trembling haze?

Remember the sound of the windy woodlands
 Leaves that stir in the wing of the wind,
 Birds' riot, and the intoxicating
 Brook that flies through the sounding boulders!

Dost thou know how beats the heart
 When to the noise of the horn and hounds
 Rustle the bushes, and lo! the stag
 Checks his leap and is here before us?

Maiden, lov'st thou the sombre twilight
 That melts to the shine of the dewy stars?
 Come, from the summit of Mellmor
 Let us watch how the night is born.

I have drunk the cool of the spirit of even,
 Seen the shadows walk over the valleys,
 Let my thoughts go wander
 Around the sea of nightly silence.

Lovely is life on the cloudy heights,
 'Tis easy to breathe in the fragrant woods,
 Ah! be my bride! I will open
 A thousand pleasures around thy heart.

In 1848 Runeberg published the work which has not only made him the poet of Finland but one of the great literary figures of the North. This was *Fanrik Stal's Sanger—The Songs of Cornet Stal*. This was a series of narrative poems dealing with the War of Independence in the early years of the nineteenth century, when Swede and Finn fought together against tremendous odds. The cycle is supposed to be said and sung by an old veteran who fought under Dobeln and Aldercreutz. The hero is undoubtedly the old corporal he had met in his early days in the wild and romantic parish in Northern Finland. As a lad Runeberg remembered the Swedish general with the black band concealing his head wound, passing through the streets of his birthplace. The poems are a medley of war songs, elegies and narratives, and we have nothing like it in England except, perhaps, Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade* or the lyrics of Campbell, or, coming to

modern times, such poems as *In Flanders Fields* and Laurence Binyon's *For the Fallen*. The poems describe all classes from the King to the most obscure private. The cycle opens with the national hymn of Finland, *Vårt Land*, and then the old ensign is described. Then you get portraits and episodes pulsating with patriotism. I can only mention a few. There is an account of William von Schwerin, the boy hero; of Lieutenant Ziden cheering on his little troop at Wasa; and the story of the youth of fifteen whose father was killed at Lappo and longs to be of age to die as his father did. One of the most telling stories is of Sven Dufva—the ugly duckling of the family, the butt of every one—who enlisted as a soldier and held an important bridge, like Horatius, against the oncoming Russians. He was found shot through the heart. The drollery of his early life is lifted into something sublime by the tribute that the commander makes to him, and to the bullet that pierced his heart rather than his head.

A middling head he had forsooth,
But still his heart was good.

There is a very fine poem in the collection called *Torpfslickan—The Village Girl*. It relates how a Finnish girl had a lover who proved a coward, and how she desired to die when she discovered the truth.

Make me a grave, O mother, dear; my days on earth are over!
The only man that fled to-day, that coward, was my lover;
He thought of me and of himself, the battle-field he scanned,
And then betrayed his brothers' hope and shamed his father's land.

When past our door the troop marched by, and I their ranks
had numbered,
I wept to think that like a man among the dead he slumbered;
I sorrowed, but my grief was mild, it had no bitter weight,
I would have lived a thousand years to mourn his noble fate.

O mother, I have looked for him where'er the dead are lying,
But none of all the stricken bear his features, calm in dying;
Now will I live no more on earth in shame to sit and sigh,
He lies not there among the dead, and therefore I will die.

The introductory poem of this stirring book of patriotism is the Finnish national anthem, and it seems fitting to quote some of it here. It illustrates not only the fervour of Runeberg in national themes, but the felicitous turns that he is capable of as well.

Our land, our land, our fatherland!
 Thou glorious word, ring forth!
 No mountain rises proud and grand,
 Nor slopes a vale, nor sweeps a strand,
 More dear than thou, land of the north
 Our fathers' native earth.

We love our rivers' thundering tide,
 Our streamlets sparkling bright;
 The murmuring of our forests wide,
 Our starry nights, our summer's pride,
 All, all that e'er, with sound or sight,
 Has filled us with delight.

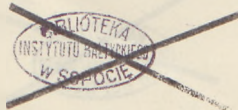
'Twas here our fathers fought the fight
 With thoughts and sword and plough;
 Here, here in moments dark or bright,
 Mid fortune's smile, or fortune's spite,
 The Finnish people's heart would glow,
 'Twould bear both weal and woe.

Oh land! thou land of thousand lakes,
 Of song and constancy;
 Against whose strand life's ocean breaks,
 Where dreams the past; the future wakes;
 Oh! blush not for thy poverty,
 Be hopeful, bold and free.

Thy blossom in the bud that lies
 Shall burst its fetters strong;
 Lo! from our tender love shall rise
 Thy light, thy fame, thy hopes, thy joys;
 And prouder far shall sound ere long
 Our Finland's patriot song!

This fine lyric, with slight changes, is also the national anthem of the Estonians, who belong to the same race and have a similar, but sadder history.

During the latter part of his life Runeberg received many honours, but one incident gave him the greatest pleasure. Walking one moonlit night he was seized with a desire to see his old humble house again. He found it, and seeing a light, he peeped through the shutters. An artizan was busy with his work and he



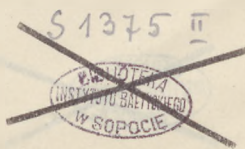
was singing. The poet listened attentively and found it was one of his own songs.

Before his death on May 6th, 1877, Runeberg wrote many beautiful hymns for the Swedish psalter, and a fine poem *The Kings at Salamis*. This poem, which combines Attic severity with modern realism, reminds you of Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*, but that is the only likeness that any one could discover in two poets so different in temper.

How then, shall we sum up the genius of this poet of the North? Perhaps in this way. Runeberg's verse possesses on the one hand patriotic fervour that is not parochial. There is healthiness in all he writes. In the *Stories of Cornet Steel* in which he extols the exploits of the Finnish army, there is no intolerance and no bitterness. He never differentiates between friend and foe when bravery and honour are shown. There is fervent admiration for the Finnish army and no hatred for the Russian.

Again, who has ever given us more clear and beautiful pictures of his fatherland and the people of Finland than Runeberg? There are few fresher delineations of a people than these. In them he has Wordsworth's gift of seeing the spiritual significance of the most trivial details of their life. But there is no sad speculation in them—all is irradiated with gentle humour and a quick sense of drama.

If he had done this only, Finland would have honoured him as a poet, but he would have been of regional interest alone. In *Kung Fjalar* and *The Kings of Salamis* he showed the triumph of his power, strength and beauty blending together. The varied corpus of his work exhibits his classic simplicity, the nobility and antique sobriety of his style, the blend of healthy realism with modern romanticism that is his, and entitles him in my judgment, not only to a niche in regional poetry but a place among the citizens of the world.



nie wypożycza się do domu

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