

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

FINNISH FOLK SONGS IN MINNESOTA

The Finnish people who came to Minnesota brought with them many old-country customs. They had a poetic language, a fondness for ancient things, legends, proverbs, folk poetry, and music. A good deal of this feeling has survived to the present time among the Finnish settlements of Minnesota, and the folk songs, consequently, are many and are in everyday use. Part of this survival may be due to the background, which in its lakes, rivers, and forests so resembles Finland. If you look at a picture in a Finnish magazine showing a view of lakes and pine woods in summer, you might think it a photograph taken in the Superior National Forest, even to the look of the rocks along the lake shores. Fir trees, birches, aspen, and the enchanted mountain ash of Finnish legend belong to both backgrounds; and these trees, the cold blue lakes, and the wild rushing rivers appear in the words of many a Finnish song. Cabins are often mentioned, and a log cabin is characteristic of the Finnish-American homestead of the older type. Even the people of the range, who build frame houses of no especial character, are almost sure to have a summer cabin on a lake, and a log-built *sauna* or steam bath, that important and delightful part of Finnish-American life, will stand beside the shore and will be heated three or four times a week. On the homestead, the *sauna* may be a very old house, although the other houses have been replaced, and it is always a picturesque little building, with a low roof and a rock fireplace. The farmhouse itself, if not of logs, may be old-country in appearance, painted the traditional dark red, if it stands near a lake, and given to outside galleries. The luck-bringing mountain ash is planted beside the door, and

on Midsummer Day the house is trimmed, inside and out, with birch branches.

In this sort of setting, but with no additional touch of color or picturesqueness in costume—for some unknown reason, no Finnish costumes have survived, even among the old women—you will hear songs of unusual musical quality, most of them very old, many of them strangely beautiful. The old ballads, love songs, and laments were originally sung to the accompaniment of the harp, the triangular Finnish instrument called a *kantele*, which has become so rare and hard to find among the Finnish settlers. I have had the good fortune to find two of them, and one *kantele*-player even chanted a bit of the "Kalevala," that ancient folk poetry of the Finns which is known to most Americans through its English translations. The poetry, without its ancient runo-tunes, is rather generally known among the Finnish settlers, and its woods gods, talking birch trees, and moose-hunting heroes seem quite at home in our forests and swamp lands. A good deal of the knowledge and study of the "Kalevala" is a result of the intelligent work of the Kaleva Lodge, a society of Finnish-Americans, chiefly middle-aged men and women. For several years the Minnesota branches have held a summer camp of a week for young people, devoted to the Finnish culture. There you may see fragments of the "Kalevala" acted out; and the old dances, which are fast dying out among the older people, revived and danced with great spirit by high-school girls and boys.

Finnish dance tunes are gay and Finnish humor is charming. The latter appears in many of the songs, and there are so many hearty rollicking tunes that one wonders if the usual American idea of "the gloomy music of the northern countries" is not a misconception. Even the melancholy airs, of which there are plenty and among the most lovely, have no feeling of self-pity; they are rather detached in spirit and have a mysticism of a purely Finnish type, as unconscious of its quality as a stream or a spruce would be.

Listening to the very old song of "The Cuckoo Calling on the Shore of Lake Saima," or the gayer but still thoughtful and symbolic song called "The Juniper Tree," you will feel their essential Finnish quality. It is not only that the airs are different from other folk tunes, but that in both tunes and words one feels the imagination, the poetry of a reserved and shy race, using song as its natural expression.

MARJORIE EDGAR

MARINE ON THE ST. CROIX, MINNESOTA

A "PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP" MEDAL

In the summer of 1932, Mr. J. C. Cavill, United States Indian agent at the Red Lake Reservation, ordered the removal of six Indian graves between the villages of Redby and Red Lake, which were in line with a new highway that was being constructed. The relatives of those buried there were notified of the date of exhuming and several of them were present at the removals. They noted that the graves were those of three men,—one of whom had been a chief,—a little girl, an old woman, and a younger woman. When one of the graves was being opened, Mrs. Ella Badboy, who had responded to the invitation to be present at the exhuming, remarked that she remembered well when Tebishgobenais, her husband, the chief whose remains would be found there, was buried. A big dance, she said, had been held, and with him was buried a medal given by a United States president to his father. The medal was found as she had predicted. It is of silver, two and three-eighths inches in diameter, and is quite intact. On the reverse side of it, the words "Peace and Friendship" are plainly readable. Both above and below the words are a peace pipe and a tomahawk with stems crossed. Between "Peace and" and "Friendship" are two hands clasped in a friendly handclasp. On the obverse side is a badly corroded portrait of the head of some person, quite evidently that of Washington.



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