

FINLAND



BY C. P. HALLIHAN



GENERAL INFORMATION

Finland is the third largest of the countries bordering the Baltic Sea, and, indeed, fifth largest of all countries wholly

in Europe. The population of this large area is less than that of Greater London at 5.25 million. Nevertheless, Finns make up 35% of the world's population north of latitude 60°N.

The Danish Islands which cluster across from the main Jutland Peninsula toward Sweden form the girdle, Latin *balteus*, which marks the beginning of the Baltic.¹ Over 1,000 sea-miles north the adjacent towns of Haparanda (Sweden) and Tornio (Finland), separated by a river but linked by a bridge, mark the northern reach of the Baltic, in the Gulf of Bothnia. The Åland Islands, extending as much as eighty miles from Finland towards Sweden, almost make a secondary belt, restricting entrance into the Gulf of Bothnia. Helsinki,² the modern capital of Finland on the shore of the Gulf of Finland, lies just north of 60°, nearly the same as Anchorage in Alaska, or Magadan on the Sea of Okhotsk. The Baltic Sea is ice-covered for about 45% of its surface area during a normal winter. This includes the Gulfs of Bothnia, Finland, and Riga, reaching maximum extent in February or March. In spring the Gulfs thaw, some ice persisting until May. Exceptionally severe winters have left the whole sea frozen, as in 1942; in 1987 over 95% of the Baltic Sea was iced. This is a given fact of Finnish life, trade and history.

The northern third of Finland lies within the Arctic Circle (66° 33' N), but does not reach to the Barents Sea, the northeast sweep of Norway interposing. Finland's third land border is with Russia to the east. Above 68° is the region known as Lapland. The name 'Lapp' is considered derogatory; the inhabitants are the Saami (Same) and, as they live also across Norway, Sweden and Russia,³ they count the term Finn to be derogatory, too.

Finnish Saami know and speak Finnish, using their own tongue⁴ only in connection with their work of reindeer herding.

Finland is dotted with countless lakes⁵ covering at least one-tenth of its area, and linked by Europe's most extensive inland waterway system. Most of the lakes are of English Lake District sizes, about 10 sq. miles or less, but Lake Saimaa covers 1,700 sq. miles. Generally low lying in the south, the undulating landscape rises to the north, and the highest mountain, Mt. Haltia on the Norwegian border, is over 4,000 feet high. The town of Rovaniemi is on the Arctic Circle, and from there northwards the 'midnight sun' can be seen throughout June and July; the rest of the country just has all night twilight. These exotic details must be put alongside February temperatures of minus 30°C, and snow accounting for well over a third of the annual precipitation. Heavily forested with pine and spruce but also birch and maple, home of bear, wolverine, elk and lynx as well as reindeer, Finland can well be considered, in its landscape, history and people, a deep secret, hidden in full view.



A tree encased in ice and snow



HISTORICAL SKETCH

✚ SWEDISH INFLUENCE

In AD 98 the Roman historian Tacitus wrote about the Fenni, people of the north. It is the first such reference in recorded history, but he might have meant the Saami. Finland however remained outside the general orbit of European events until the 12th century, but what happened then is startling.

The First Crusade, 1096–99, had been deemed successful: Jerusalem freed and a ‘Christian’ kingdom established in the Holy Land. By 1145 there was need for a Second Crusade. To the first had gone gladly Saxons, Poles, Danes, Norwegians and Swedes, but now they were anxious rather about the threat from the north—heathens and Slavic schismatics along the Baltic shores. The full ‘privileges’ of a crusade, equal to those for all who went

Turku Castle



to the Holy Land, were accorded by Pope Eugenius to those who would ‘take the Cross’ and fight in the Baltic region. In 1155 (the year Henry II acquired Ireland by gift of the Pope, and birth-year of Genghis Khan) King Erik of Sweden and his English-born Bishop Henry led a crusade to southwestern

Finland! Henry was murdered by a Finnish peasant, but later became Finland’s patron saint. A second and third northern crusade followed, and by 1293 the eastern border of Finland had become the northernmost demarcation between Catholic west and Orthodox east.



Early Finnish dress

From the 13th to the 19th century Finland was effectively a territory of Sweden, the culture, church, and education predominantly Swedish. The language of the aristocracy and government was Swedish. Conquerors’ castles and stone churches were built, and a German publication⁶ identified Finland on a map of Europe for the first time in 1493. A Swedish language university was established in Finland by Queen Christina of Sweden, at Turku (Åbo) in 1640. After 1700 Sweden’s influence in Finland began to wane as the power of Russia waxed stronger.

✚ RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

Czar Peter the Great founded the great city of St. Petersburg at the head of the Gulf of Finland in 1703.⁷ Sweden built new fortresses in southern Finland, but ceded parts of eastern Finland to Russia. After a century of rumbling conflict Sweden was defeated in battle by Russia.

Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy within Russia in 1809. Helsinki was declared capital of the Grand Duchy, rather than Turku (Åbo), in 1812, and the University moved there in 1828. Finland enjoyed considerable political freedom, and prospered under Alexander II (1818–81), who encouraged wider use of Finnish, partly to weaken links with Sweden and partly to foster a Finnish cultural identity. In the 1860s a Finnish currency, the *markka*, was introduced; sawmilling began to flourish, and the paper industry developed. A 'Finnish Manifesto' was issued by Emperor Nicholas II in 1899, arousing considerable hostility in Finland, where it was seen as 'Russification', eroding Finnish autonomy. The resistance united all levels of society, and continued until independence was declared in December 1917.⁸

✚ INDEPENDENCE

Acquiring its own national parliament in 1906, Finland was the first country in the world to give equal and universal suffrage, the right to vote and to stand for election, to men and women. Twelve years later, 1918 brought brief civil war to Finland, a reaction to the Revolutionary events in Russia, and an even briefer dalliance with the possibility of monarchy. In 1919 K.J. Ståhlberg became the first president of a republican government. The Åland Islanders sought to become part of Sweden. Finland granted them autonomy in 1920, but refused to allow secession: they remain an autonomous part of the state of Finland.



German built WWII tank in Finnish colours

In 1939 the Soviet Union, taking advantage of a pact with Nazi Germany, seized much of eastern Finland. Desperate for help, Finland turned to Germany, an unhappy alliance, for which the Soviet Union exacted heavy reparations after the War. During the Cold War years Finland managed to tread delicately, maintaining a democratic tradition and mixed economy without offending too much her powerful neighbour, the Soviet Union. This meant very limited freedom of activity in international affairs, but Finland did become a member of the European Union in 1995.

Finnish creativity has been generally recognized since the World Fair in Paris in 1900, when the Finnish pavilion was so much admired. From that time, in architecture, literature, music and modern technology, Finland has commanded respect and healthy trade. Adapting patiently to the demands of high latitude living, always vulnerable to the loom of larger neighbours, Finland today is one of Europe's most prosperous nations.

KARELIA

Taking the Russian town of St. Petersburg and the eastern border of Finland as a base, then sweeping northeast through Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega to the White Sea, one has outlined the Republic of Karelia. But—the Karelians living west of the border, in Finland, have been excluded! We may speak of Russian Karelia and Finnish Karelia, but to the Karelians, and to many Finns, Karelia is an integral part of the Finnish heritage. Up to the early 14th century the Karelians were one of the Finnish tribes, living undivided by political borders. As the region came to be an ecclesiastical ‘western front’ between Eastern and Western Christendom, then the border became critical, changing frequently; the last internationally accepted demarcation was drawn in 1944.

Finnish cultural history has rich roots in Karelia: the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*, together with other folk poetry, is derived mainly from the ‘undivided’

Karelia. Karelia provided inspiration for many of Finland’s leading artists, composers and writers, playing an important role in the awakening and development of a Finnish national identity. The loss of the greater part of



Karelia also had other effects on Finland, as it had been the more heavily industrialised area of the old Grand Duchy. Approximately one third of Finnish industrial output in the 19th century was from Karelia to the Russian market, and exports of paper went almost entirely to Russia.⁹

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Given the history outlined above, you will see that Swedish was for long the major language spoken in Finland, and is still recognised as one of the two official languages of the country. However, the grass roots tongue before, during and after Swedish suzerainty was always Finnish, now the major language. It is one of the Finno-Ugrian languages, a group which includes Hungarian, Estonian, Lapp and several lesser-known languages spoken in Russia.¹⁰ Estonian and Finnish are just about mutually comprehensible, but a Hungarian friend described listening to Finnish as ‘tantalising—it sounds like I should understand it, but I don’t at all’.¹¹ It is thought that speakers of the language have been living in the general area (present-day Finland-Lapland-Karelia) for several millennia. Long contact with the speakers of neighbouring Indo-European languages has left a rich two-way pattern of loan words and grammatical influence.

From the end of the 12th century the Swedish realm and sphere of influence also meant the Roman Catholic Church and the Latin language. The most

important place of study for Finns in the 14th century was Paris and in the 15th century Prague and Leipzig, using Latin as the common language. There was little literature created in Finland, and the earliest writer known by name is Jöns Budde in the late 15th century. His work included the translation of whole books of the Bible into Swedish. Finland's first printed book was the *Missale Aboense*, a Latin mass-book printed in Lübeck, with a

representative woodcut of Turku Cathedral, in 1488. With the reformation focus on mother tongue, the first Finnish language book was soon printed, albeit in Stockholm. It was the work of Bishop Michael Agricola, an 'ABC' book on Finnish grammar in 1543.¹²

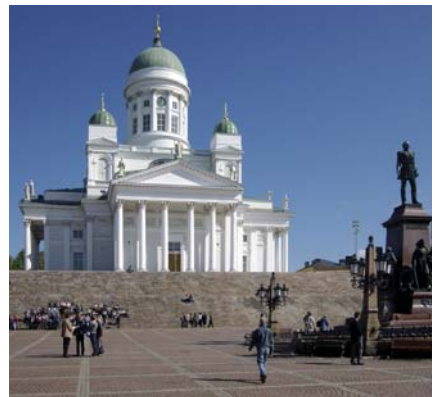
lecturing on the *Kalevala*. The hauntingly relentless metre inspired Longfellow's *Hiawatha* in 1855. Both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, with their many imitators, were massively indebted to the work, and Finland's great composer, Jean Sibelius, claimed it as his muse. Tove Jansson, Helsinki-born and writing in Swedish, published the first of her *Moominland* books for children one hundred years later, in 1945—but the ambience of the *Kalevala* is plainly there.

RELIGION

UP TO THE REFORMATION

In a Finnish translation of the Psalms published in 1551 there was included an apparent catalogue of ancient Finnish mythology. This, along with the much later *Kalevala*, gives a shadowy glimpse of a shamanistic, animistic religion prevailing there before the incursions of Roman and Orthodox Christianity into the area: and

Main cathedral of Helsinki and statue of Russian Czar Alexander II



Other than the Scriptures, the towering work of Finnish literature is the *Kalevala*. Dr. Elias Lönnrot, 1802–84, published a small edition in 1835, and a larger revised edition in 1849. The *Kalevala*, or *Old Poems from Karelia telling the Ancient History of the Finnish People*, casts the wise Väinämöinen and their master smith Ilmarinen as central characters. It is Finland's *Iliad*. As early as 1845 the German philologist Jakob Grimm¹³ was

lingering after! The core human facts of a creation, a fall, an heroic redemption, a green and pleasant future, are vaguely there, distorted, dark, and without a glimmer of Gospel, yet still witness to mankind's origin and need. This witness is common throughout the nations, not of an 'evolution' of religion, but of the universal fall, the shared history of the fallen race up to Babel and the astounding tenacity but utter insufficiency of oral tradition. Thank God for revelation and the Scripture of Truth!

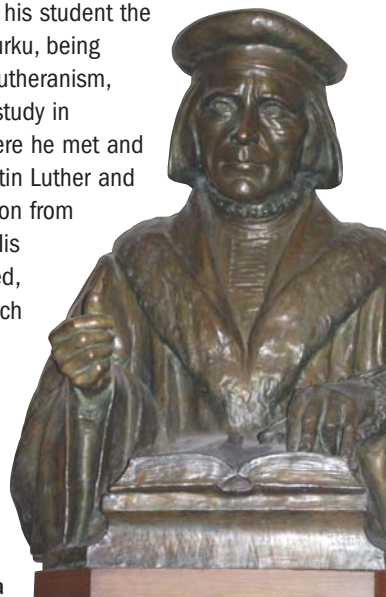
Things changed, superficially, from the 12th century. The influence of the Byzantine, Eastern Church came through Russian Novgorod to the Karelians, and with the Swedish 'crusades' 1155–1293 came the Western Roman Church. These agencies were syncretistic in their attitude to existing practices, and rites to do with ancestor worship were part of 'christian' practice even in 19th-century Finland. By the end of the 13th century most of Finland was under Roman and Swedish tutelage, and the most powerful man in Finland was the Bishop of Turku. In the mercies of our great God, this had unforeseen benefit in the early 16th century.

Sweden, by its close association with Germany, responded very quickly to the teachings of Luther, in both their religious and political implications. In 1527 the Diet of Västerås (on Lake Mälaren) urged by King Gustavus Vasa, broke with Rome and effectually instituted a Lutheran state Church. One fears that, as with Henry VIII

in England, secular convenience was uppermost for the King; nevertheless it opened a way for the Gospel, and the Augsburg Confession was formally accepted at Uppsala in 1593. Finland, from that time to the present, is declared as Lutheran. Finnish students had always sought learning far afield, and in the early 1500s Luther's Wittenberg became, and long remained, a favourite destination.

✚ MICHAEL AGRICOLA AND THE BIBLE

Michael Agricola was born at Pernaja, not very far from Helsingfors (modern Helsinki) round about 1510. Whilst studying at Turku, where he was clerk and secretary to the Bishop, he encountered Pietari Särkilahti. Särkilahti had been Luther's first Finnish student, and pioneer of the Reformation in Finland. When Agricola became his student the then Bishop of Turku, being sympathetic to Lutheranism, sent Michael to study in Wittenberg.¹⁴ There he met and studied with Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon from 1536 to 1539. His studies completed, they gave him such admirable commendation that he became principal of the Cathedral school at Turku.



Michael Agricola

Agricola taught the theology of the Reformation and the Bible, more concerned with the need for dissemination of the Truth than with controversy or confrontation. The aim of translating the Bible into Finnish was truly vital, and had even been begun before he went to Wittenberg, but Agricola felt constrained to work also on other basic material in the language of the people. Between 1543 and 1552 he published nine books, all printed in Stockholm. The first publication, as we have seen, was a primer called *Abckiria*, which probably appeared in 1543; others were catechisms, prayer books and directories of Lutheran worship. In many of these Michael Agricola took occasion to include historical, meteorological and theological matters, calendar constructions, and even health and cleanliness rules! He translated some of Luther's work, and published a book on the Passion of Christ.

Agricola's outstanding achievement was the New Testament in Finnish, translated directly from the Greek New Testament, with Luther's German and Erasmus's Latin to hand for guidance. As *Se Wsi Testamenti* it was published in 1548. Only five hundred copies were printed, but over one hundred have survived, printed in gothic typeface and well supplied with woodcut illustrations. Between 1551 and 1552 Agricola managed to publish a translation of about one-quarter of the Old Testament, but a complete Finnish Bible was not published until 1642.



The title page of *Se Wsi Testamenti*—
the New Testament translated by Agricola

The National Library of Finland

Because of his extensive and original literary production, his influence is fundamental to the Finnish language. Of Agricola's 8,500-word Finnish vocabulary, 4,500 (53%) are still in modern use. Well is he revered as the Father of the Finnish Language. Of his spiritual, Gospel progeny, only the Day will reveal it. When the Bishop of Turku died in 1550, Michael Agricola assumed the duties, but was not confirmed in the office for four years. In 1557 he went to Moscow, involved in peace talks between Russia and Sweden; returning home through Karelia he fell ill, and died on April 9th 1557, still a relatively young man but drained by the labours of the Gospel, the Bible and Truth:¹⁵ April 9th is a national holiday in Finland.

✦ **PIETISM, AND
PAAVO RUOTSALAINEN
(1777–1852)**

Attachment to any national church too easily tends to become too much nominal and cultural rather than confessional and personal. This results for some in a hungering and thirsting for reality in the truth and experience of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and for fellowship in the resulting way of life. Such religion, in many ages and in many countries, has attracted the label of Pietism. So it was in Finland, and is sharply brought to view in the life of Paavo Ruotsalainen.

He was born and reared in such extreme poverty that even the bread flour was ‘stretched’ with ground-up pine bark. In a time when the Bible was becoming scarce in Finland he was given a Bible at the age of six, and began his learning in



Paavo
Ruotsalainen

his ‘pine-bark academy’. In 1796 there was revival in Finland, and Paavo joined the number of those called The Awakened, yet still was unsure of himself. He heard of a blacksmith who might help, and in 1799 travelled 150 winter miles to find Jaakko Högman.

Stressing the need of Christ, Högman directed him to the pamphlet ‘Honey out of the Rock’¹⁶

by the English Baptist Thomas Willcox. This sent Paavo back to the Word of God with new eyes; he was soon settled in Christ, and for the rest of his life went about evangelising, pastoring and teaching. Resting in Christ, and not piety, inevitably bore the fruit of piety, and attracted persecution and ridicule from the world and from the church. After Ruotsalainen’s death in 1852 that body of believers known as The Awakened continued, and still survives in Finland.

✦ **MODERN**

In the mid-19th century an evangelical movement diverged from Pietism, and continues still, having effect within and without the Lutheran Church. About the same time, Lars Leevi Laestadius (1800–1861) was preaching in Swedish Lapland, but Finland soon became the centre of the Laestadian movement, doctrinally conservative, avowedly



Representation of Thomas Willcox from the title page of his pamphlet ‘Honey out of the Rock’

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legalistic and exclusive, and in continuance today. The pietistic Awakened, the legalistic Laestadian and the more general Evangelical movements are attended by a train of smaller secessions and mergers,¹⁷ and it is not always clear to see whether they regard themselves as within or without the National Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Almost all of this is mirrored in the Finnish Lutheran churches in North America. What Finnish writers refer to as Anglo-American Christianity began to appear in Finland from the latter part of the 19th century: Baptists, Methodists, Adventists, Salvation Army, and Pentecostalism. The Roman Catholic Church had all but disappeared from Finland after the Reformation, but became registered as the Catholic Church in Finland in 1929, few in number and mostly in the southern vicinity of Helsinki, serviced by a Polish priesthood. The Orthodox Church suffered long through its perceived association with the process of Russification, but the trend of decline has recently stayed, and Orthodoxy now claims over 1% of the population, against Romanism's just under 1%. Finland feels keenly the plight of Baltic States after the collapse of the USSR, being closely related to the Estonians particularly, but equally to many of the 'unreached' ethnic groups in Russia itself. Not surprisingly the Finns respond to underdogs, and there are communities of refugees from Somalia as well as from Central Europe and Greater Russia. Some of these, inevitably, are Muslim.

✚ TRINITARIAN BIBLE SOCIETY

The Bible of 1642, derived from the work of Agricola, came to have in Finland a similar position to that of the Authorised Version in England. Translated by Petraeus, Stodius, Matthaei and Hoffman, it was published, under the patronage of Queen Christina of Sweden, by the clergy of Finland. Revised several times, the edition of 1933/8, the *Raamattu*, still holds the affection of conservative Bible readers, but is not strictly Textus Receptus-based.

Through the 18th century the printed Bible became quite scarce in Finland, and matters didn't improve under Russian influence in the 19th. Funds derived from the corn tithe intended to be used for Bible publication became lost in general state expenditure. The British and Foreign Bible Society began to publish the Finnish Bible quite soon in its ministry, using presses in Turku. These were destroyed in



1885 TBS edition of the Finnish New Testament open at 1 Corinthians 13

1827 by drastic fire, and production ceased until 1832, by which time the Trinitarian Bible Society had been founded in distinction from the BFBS. TBS published the Finnish New Testament in 1885 and 1889, just about the time that the whole ground of Bible text and translation began to shift away from Received Text and formal equivalence.¹⁸ The Society has not had the Finnish Scriptures in its catalogue for very many years.



EPILOGUE

The intent of these articles is to present material for your information, discerning use and prayers: material that is as accurate as attainable, presented within a ‘worldview’ of the Sovereignty of God, the outworking of His purpose, and the furtherance of the Gospel in all places and at all times. History really is His Story.

Finland was early and directly affected by the Lutheran Reformation, and still has a National Church more evangelically-minded than many such; give thanks, and pray that she may realise her heritage. Finland seems to have an unassuaged thirst for spiritual reality; thank God, be provoked, and pray that it may be filled. There is also a scarcely realised need for a reliable Bible: pray that it may be realised and supplied.

ENDNOTES:

1. The name goes back to the 11th century, but to the Finns, Swedes and Germans, it is the East Sea; and to

the Estonians it is the West Sea! The Belt means that the Baltic is almost tideless, and ‘brackish’ rather than salt.

2. I have tried for consistency in using modern Finnish names—Turku, not Åbo, etc.

3. There have been ‘Lapp’ Bibles produced in each of these countries, in Roman, Gothic, and Cyrillic script.

4. I have read that it has no word for ‘war’ or ‘violence’.

5. Sources quote as few as 60,000, as many as 188,000.

6. At times ‘Baltic’ Germany was referred to, almost jokingly, as South Sweden.

7. Russia’s need for unhindered access to and through the Baltic is a huge factor in the history and politics of the eight other countries with Baltic ports, not least Lithuania with her ice-free Memel/Klaipėda.

8. In the intervening years, though, over 300,000 Finns emigrated to North America.

9. A history teacher skated over difficulties with the formula ‘these events do not lend themselves to clear narration’. I hide behind it now, apologising for this tiny offering, but Karelia must be in the picture.

10. Especially in lands which were the old Republic of Novgorod.

11. Visitors to the TBS library sometimes challenge the classification of Finnish material alongside Hungarian, many shelves away from the Scandinavian languages: but it is linguistically correct.

12. This burden to instruct in the language as a precursor to Scripture publication was a factor in all countries where the vernacular had been eclipsed until the Reformation. It is interesting to put this alongside the modern quandary for Bible Society work where a language seems to be in decline: does one teach and supply Scriptures in the vernacular, or fall back on a lingua franca such as English, French, Swahili or Hindi?

13. One of the Fairy Tale brothers.

14. I wonder if his contemporaries there confused him as readily with Luther’s favourite Protestant composer, Martin Agricola, or even the theologian Johann Agricola, as later students have.

15. I have it in mind that an Orthodox dignitary from Karelia was in Moscow on similar business at the same time, and ended in prison!

16. Still in print in this country.

17. The names, such as Beseechers, Seekers, Silent Movement, 5th Revival, indicate the nature.

18. Not suddenly, the process was easily fifty-plus years old, but in the 1880s it became apparent outside the realm of scholarship and in the published texts of the Bible.