

I DISCOVER THE FINNS

(By NEGLEY FARSON, author of "Way of a Transgressor," in "The Listener," London)

YOU will say that a bed in a Copenhagen State hospital was not the proper place for a newspaper correspondent during this dismal war. My New York connections thought so, and cabled me not to spend any of my advance expense money upon my own personal needs. A little later they wired me that they wanted only "exclusive stuff" about the Great War. As I could not be exclusive about this growing world-wide calamity, I returned them their contract.

It makes an interesting contrast. I first went to Scandinavia, my ship's mooring line smashing open a valuable cask of fish-oil at Stavanger, in 1914. The first authentic Norwegian I heard was the storm of curses from the men who owned that fish-oil on the wharf. I was thrilled by their song-like language, although I made up my mind then I would never attempt to learn any of the Scandinavian tongues. But back in my ancestry somewhere is a Norwegian or a Swede, or a Dane — undoubtedly a couple of these. So, in an atavistic way, I felt that I had come home again.

Yet, until these nine weeks just spent in the Sundry Hospital, I never yet had acquired any clear vision of where a Norwegian ended and a Swede began, or what was the real difference (if there was any) between either of these two people and a Dane. I lumped them collectively as a Northern race, with a high sense of liberty, very dogged about that, a charming open-air life for, what seemed to me, almost everybody, and the best goat-cheese in the world.

Scandinavia's Sense of Values

When I passed through Christiania (now Oslo) in 1914, the people in my hotel were drinking champagne at 11 a.m. in the morning. They were rollicking from the profits that their shipping would bring in. They did not have any time to display any distinct national traits; they were just business men.

During the next three years when I ducked in and out of Russia to Stockholm, I frequently had my head bitten off by the Swedes because we Americans were tampering with their boats in New York. I formed the conclusion then that the Swedes, at least, were very fierce and dour Scandinavians. Yet, when I was being carried back, for an operation, to New York, it was a gigantic Swede who picked me up as easily as a basket of grapes and carried me into the train.

And it was through the kindly financial help of this Swede that, literally, I did get on my feet again, and back to Russia, where

he and I, until the Revolution ruined both of us, were partners for a time.

The one trip I made to Copenhagen during that time was an illicit mission (commissioned by some bankers in New York) to see if I could not buy some electrodes there from Siemens-Schuckert, the German firm.

I was still ignorant of these essential differences (if there are any), between Norwegian, Dane and Swede. And now, when I returned in 1939, I found another Scandinavian State: the Finns.

Now, during these nine weeks in Copenhagen's hospital, my bed was so high, and



"GIFT" FROM RUSSIA: Finnish soldiers examining with deep interest an automatic rifle captured from the Russians on the northern front, and now the proud possession of a Finn. On left is one of the reindeer used for transport by the Finns

I was so often alone with time to meditate, that I acquired almost an Olympian view of what was going on. And these are some of the things I saw clearly:

Equality for Most

First, the hospital: it was a daily demonstration of what I would call the wholesome, whole-wheat quality of the Scandinavian sense of values. There unquestionably are some very, very rich and some very, very poor people in these four Northern countries. But there are strikingly few at either end of the scale who are enjoying or lamenting either of these two outrageous strokes of fortune. For the great mass of people in Scandinavia the butter is spread with nearly equal thickness on all their various bits of bread. This hospital was run for the great mass of the people: the poor, the middle, even the fairly-well-off class — and the difference between what we had to pay could not vary by more than ten shillings, because that was the highest price they had.

We all ate the same food. We all could have a free shave twice weekly. And that famous brewery which has given so many works of art to its beloved and already-loved Copenhagen gave us each a daily

bottle of beer. When I say that a professional tramp in the next ward and I both ate the same food — and found it, perhaps, the best we had ever tasted — I must admit that the Dane, any Dane, feeds better than his counterpart in any other country on earth.

This was just one (for me) Heaven-sent demonstration of the way these Northern people think a man should live. But in the newspapers I had translated to me every day, I had an increasingly angry demonstration of how these Scandinavians think a person should be *let* live.

Where Peace is a Habit

Peace with them is a habit. Neutrality, with them, is not a political attitude; it's a state of mind. And it was being outraged daily. They reacted to it in their various ways, based chiefly upon their geographical exigencies. They could not enjoy the 3,000-miles-away neutrality which my own country enjoys — for the moment. And, following Roosevelt's sensible statement that, as a Government, the U.S.A. must preserve a strict neutral attitude, but everyone was entitled to his own personal opinion, it was an outraged Dane who said to me:

"Neutrality! Neutrality is nothing but the consistent hiding under the bed while you know a burglar is going through the house!" Then he added bitterly: "Thank God for the Finns! Thank God for a race that can still be fanatical!"

That pleased me. For we Americans (I can see no reason why we are entitled to) have the feeling somehow that "Finland is our baby." But what pleased me more was the way these Scandinavians spoke of each other. The Danes, for instance, say: "The Swedes can be very tough, you know. There's something rugged in their character." It was a Danish journalist who called me up at 2 a.m. to tell me the Norwegians had stopped the *City of Flint*. He just wanted to break the glad news — which almost got me out of hospital. And it was an American official in Norway who sent me a sailor's hat-band from the *City of Flint* — with a most gleeful note about the "inside dope."

Meeting a Challenge

To read this Scandinavian press every morning — fighting so bitterly to maintain real neutrality — and to hear the growls of indignation from the Scandinavians (as they read the day's quota of German insults), was most invigorating.

I love these people. And as I talked with those adventurous souls who took the long bicycle — or tram-ride out of Copenhagen "centre" to visit my weary bones, I grew to love them more, and came to the final conclusion that, if things go on the way they are, there soon won't be any *essential* difference between them. I watched a Scandinavian mental "front" coalescing, which is best pictured by a Finn who came to see me.

"I have just got a letter from my son!" she cried. "He is so happy. He feels he is meeting a *challenge*! Listen to what he writes":

Our doctor said to an old peasant woman, "You know, Marta, any day now, perhaps millions of Russians will be coming in here, trying to kill us?"

The old lady scratched her chin, then she stared around at the trees, the stones and lakes — "But where," she finally asked, "will we find the soil to *bury* all those people?"