

**SQUIRE HELLMAN
AND
OTHER STORIES**

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Squire Hellman and other stories by Juhani Aho

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CONTENTS.



	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	7
1. SQUIRE HELLMAN . . .	21
2. WHEN FATHER BROUGHT HOME THE LAMP . . .	131
3. PIONEERS	153
4. LOYAL	163



INTRODUCTION.

THE FINNISH NOVEL.

THE Finnish novel may be called the baby of the great Romance Family. Thirty years^{*} ago it was unborn, but from the very first hour of its birth it displayed an astonishing vitality and shot up so swiftly in every direction as to leave very little room in the native literature for anything else. It is true that we do find a few somewhat second-

^{*} I do not forget Gummerus and Kivi; but they can scarcely be taken seriously as romance-writers. They were rather pioneers who cleared the way for a later generation. The Finnish novel really begins with *Päivärinta*.

rate lyric poets among the modern native writers, while *Minna Canth* has shown that the language of the *Kalevala* can even lend itself to the requirements of the modern drama ; but, taken as a whole, the Finnish literature is a literature of novels. That this literature has hitherto entirely escaped the notice of foreign scholars is scarcely surprising when one considers the comparative isolation of the Finnish people and the superlative difficulty of the Finnish language ; but that it will become known, one day, may be fairly assumed in an age so greedy of discoveries and so curious of novelties as our own. In the meantime, a brief description of this out-of-the-way corner of the Republic of Letters may, perhaps, serve as an introduction to the *first* English translation of a Finnish novel.

The most characteristic and original of the Finnish novelists is *Pietari Päivärinta*. Born in 1827 of parents so poor that they were frequently forced to send out their children to beg bread for the starving family, he followed the plough till comparatively late in life when an accident laid him, for a time, on a bed of sickness. From

his boyish days he had always hungered after knowledge and devoured, in his rare moments of leisure, such books as fell in his way, and he now employed his enforced leisure in writing a description of his own simple but bitter experiences, entitled "Elämäni" (My life). This little sketch (it consists of but sixty-two pages) was, in 1876, published by the National Finnish Educational Society, and met with a success which justified the author in quitting agriculture for literature. He now began that long series of novels and sketches which have made his name so famous in his native land, and of which the following are the most notable: "Elämän havainnoita" (Reflections from life); "Minä ja muut" (Myself and others); "Uudistalo" (The new settlement); "Halla aamuna" (A frosty morning); "Vaimoni" (My wife); "Tahton voima" (The power of the will), the two latter being especially beautiful and pathetic stories. *Päivärinta* is the chronicler *par excellence* of Finnish peasant-life; but his method, though simple, is peculiar. He is perhaps best de-