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MY JOURNEY TO IITTALA IN FINLAND

When I was asked to go to Finland I hesitated before I agreed to go. Now I wonder why? It was the most interesting and exciting journey I have ever known.

Let me tell you all about it, or at least about some of it. I was welcomed at the Air Terminal by Miss Vaulu, the secretary in the London Office, and she assured me I would enjoy myself.

When we arrived in Helsinki at 11.30 we were met by the U.K. Sales Manager whom I already knew, and we were soon driven the 75 miles to our hotel which was at Aulanko, and with refreshments in our bedrooms we were soon asleep.

The hotel is a dream hotel. Set in its own grounds of pine trees, golf course, tennis courts, etc., it makes an ideal tourist centre.

Monday we started the conference, and first we were asked to design a piece of glass. Next a questionnaire on various facets in the selling of "i" Glass from Iittala, which I found most interesting.

Then on to a discussion on the "i" philosophy which had us all thinking hard.

After lunch I played golf before starting another lecture, illustrated by films, covering the method of manufacture used in the factory.

At 5 o'clock we were introduced to the Finnish Sauna and we all enjoyed it immensely. After twenty minutes in the heat, a dive into the lake left us really refreshed. This repeated and I had lost 3 Kilos in weight, but who cared: I felt fine.

After dinner we went on a boat trip heading into the midnight sun and trying to guess when it was setting or rising.

Next morning we drove round Hämeenlinna, where we saw the birthplace of Sibelius, the International ski jump, the Sports Centre and the Grand Prix Race track.

We then went to the Iittala Glass Works, and after a discussion we toured the warehouse and factory, where we followed the glass through every stage of manufacture.

After lunch we were initiated into the art of glass blowing and, of course, having been well trained in our earlier lectures, we passed with honours.

Next we went to the Shop and Development Department where we were asked to pass judgment on some new designs and where we saw some new ideas on display.

Then we went to a museum and home of one of Finland's leading sculptors before going on to a restaurant at another lakeside for dinner.

We returned to Aulanko at about 9 o'clock and then went out for more golf, followed at 11 o'clock by another Sauna and midnight found us swimming in the lake.

Wednesday morning was spent analysing the answers to the two questionnaires and it is interesting that our replies were very similar to those of Swedish visitors a week earlier.

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This over, we were taken to a typical Finnish farm house, where we enjoyed a smoke Sauna. This is the original Sauna where you cook in the smoke, and it was wonderful to dive into a spring pool after it.

Our hosts had provided a Guitar Group so that we enjoyed our picnic lunch to the strains of Finnish and English folk songs.

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After lunch we went to the farmer's summer house where the mosquitoes were very numerous. However, we went into the house where a log fire kept the mosquitoes away and where we were told the candles were lit in honour of the English visitors. The house was right on the lakeside so we enjoyed another swim before returning to the hotel for the "i" dinner.

This was the high spot of the tour. After cocktails we went into dinner. Our seats were marked with an envelope which contained our "Glass Blowers" certificates. Each one is in ancient Finnish and mine has a photo of me blowing glass overstamped with the Company's trade mark.

We all drank the toast "Iittala and Finland" with enthusiasm and our thanks to the Company were suitably expressed.

Thursday morning we returned to Helsinki where a guide took us on a tour of the city and answered our many questions.

We went to a reception in the Government Banqueting Hall and then on to a hotel to meet Timo Sarpaneva, one of the world's leading designers, who had come down from Lapland to meet us.

After lunching with him we just had time for some shopping before returning to the Airport for the flight home.

Well! what did I learn? I hope I have conveyed, to all who are selling glass, my enthusiasm for "i" glass; for the beauty of its design; for the pride of the people who make it as well as its ability to stand up to hard wear.

For the rest, a profound respect for everything Finnish; a great love of their country; its architecture and, above all, its people. An admiration for the confidence they have in their young people whom they train and then trust in them.

I am deeply indebted to the Directors of Iittala for the time they gave me so freely, to the Export and U.K. Sales Managers for the enthusiasm with which they entertained us, and to Paula Ravi and Inkeri Lahdenpaa who worked so hard to see everything was really perfect for us.

F.W.Tomlin.

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