

Glimpses of Bulgaria
During the
Present Crisis

By

Miss Mary M. Haskell

Lately returned after nearly thirty years residence
in Bulgaria

OBERLIN, OHIO

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To the Lovers of Mela (dear) Bulgaria

Dear Friends:—

During the 56 years since my parents first went to your country, Bulgarian friends have become too many to permit me to write long letters to you all separately, hence this general letter. I am sorry our permit to travel came so suddenly we could not get word to many of your friends; however the "Still White Danube," the old Balkans, the Rilos, the Rhodopes, Vitosha, and the Perin Mountains, the rose gardens and the crystal streams, all wish to be remembered to you, and would be glad to see you home again as soon as times permit. Bulgaria needs her sons, and your mothers, wives and little ones are "awearying" to see you.

Are you asking whether your "Mela Maika (dear Mother) Bulgaria" has formed an eternal alliance with Germany, and is surrendering her liberty and property to such an alliance? She truly is in a difficult place, but "Mr. Deutcher" will not be able to subjugate her. No German officers are allowed to command in the army, nor are any Germans permitted to help run the government. I was in Sophia last fall at the time of the Kaiser's visit, and learned of the great pressure he brought to bear on Bulgaria in trying to get her to break with the United States. OF COURSE SUCH A BREAK WOULD BE GREATLY TO GERMANY'S ADVANTAGE. Not only did Bulgaria refuse to break, but moreover the Prime Minister forbade the publishing of articles against the U. S. A., which articles would have helped the German cause but endangered friendly relations between Bulgaria and America. I attended a stormy session of Parliament, when the Deputies became greatly excited over the discussion of how much Bulgaria had sent to Germany in return for what they claimed to be very little.

Since beginning my letter news has come of the new Cabinet Ministry. The three members whom I know are fine men. Let me add the testimony of Mr. Archibald Walker, of Boston, Mass., who has been for years in Sophia in the interests of the Standard Oil Co. Mr. Walker is well known as a keen, shrewd, fearless, thoroughly honest business man, and very much of an American. His admiration and respect as well as *friendship* for Premier Malinoff and Mr. Laiptcheff (the new minister of finance), mean a big recom-

mendation of these statesmen. The present Minister of Justice, a professor in the Sophia University, I learned to admire in the Balkan Wars, when his sister was my colleague in Red Cross work. This sister went to Russia with a Red Cross nurses' Unit when the European war opened. The Professor is a "Radical Democrat," whereas most of the Ministry belong to the "Democrat" party. "The Social Democrats" are increasing. In normal times they have 12 publications connected with their various departments, but now they issue only the "Workingman's Daily" ("Rabotnichisky Vestnek"), one of the most reliable papers published and one which I found personally to be an educator. On May 1st, last year, I attended the big mass meeting of the Socialists. The speeches were all fine and one of the best was that of a woman, Mrs. Deputy Kirkoff.

Conditions of life were not easy when I left Bulgaria. The town people fared worse than the villagers, so it is well that 80 per cent. of the people are farmers. Eggs were costing fifty stotinky each, milk a lev and a half the litre. If we reckon the lev as 20c, then butter cost \$3 the pound, and 8 pounds of good laundry soap cost me about \$20. We are thankful that these articles could be had *without coupons*. Commodities obtained *with coupons*, such as bread, meat, sugar, rice, cheese, shoes and cloth had regulated prices but were more difficult to obtain, especially in sufficient quantities. Cloth and shoes seemed to be disappearing from the market. I would suggest that you all lay aside money regularly to be able to send home at the first possible moment to your dear ones who are probably heaping up debts with the belief you would not wish them to starve. Soldiers at the front receive 15 levs monthly and their families receive 12 levs per head to the maximum of 45 levs.

With the men gone it is very hard for the mothers to control the boys and girls, and the government, recognizing this, has made great efforts to keep all the schools open. Since many school buildings are now serving as hospitals, children from two districts are often obliged to use the same building by attending school half the day, some coming mornings and the rest afternoons.

Are you not glad of the TOLERANCE of your countrymen in retaining the Russian, French and English languages in the school programs? The beautiful school "Gladstone" keeps its name, as do the streets, and the Bulgarian kiddies, called for that good man. The Sophia hotels are nearly all turned into hospitals, but they are

still called by their old names, "London," "Bristol," "Paris," etc. Only the great cathedral back of Parliament, (said to be the finest in the Balkan Peninsula) instead of being called after the Liberator of Bulgaria, "Alexander Nevsky," is now called after the missionaries who brought Christianity to the Slavs, "Sts. Cyril and Methodius." The Russian monuments are unmolested, altho a bomb from a French aeroplane just missed hitting the finest monument in the country, that beautiful equestrian pile, dedicated "To Our King Liberator, from Grateful Bulgaria." This war can not last forever. Some glad day all the nations will be friends.

Said George Sardjoff from Salonica, on returning from the Monastir front last summer, "We were opposite the Italians. What voices those people have for singing! On May evenings when they would begin to sing, we couldn't stay in our trenches, we would slink out and sit around in the open!" (Don't you Bulgarians claim to be "born, married and buried to music?") Over and over the lad remarked, "The soldiers at the front don't hate their opponents. There is no cause for that. Those fellows didn't want to come to fight us any more than we wanted to fight them. We all *had* to go!"

Yes, they *had* to go to war, and they have sometimes yielded to the temptation to pay back their foes in their own coin, for which we are sorry; but we American missionaries have lived in old Bulgaria and in Macedonia throughout all the recent wars; we have known people of the *various nationalities* (pro-Entente and pro-German, who have not loved each other) we have taken a vital interest in the matter of how these peoples have treated each other, we have traveled, we have seen with our eyes, and people from all sides have poured into our ears, and I think any unprejudiced person would say we have been able to collect and weigh evidence which would enable us to arrive at true conclusions; and I want you to have the comfort of knowing, that we are thankful, indeed, that your BULGARIAN ARMY AND GOVERNMENT HAVE NOT GIVEN THE ANGELS SUCH CAUSE TO WEEP as some people would have one suppose.

Have you heard of the "Anglo Saxon League" of Sophia? It was a society Mr. Stoyan Vatralsky established some years ago, "for the Promulgation of Anglo Saxon Ideals in the Balkans." I asked Mr. Vatralsky what he meant by "Anglo Saxon ideals," and he replied in a way that would have satisfied Mr. William Allen White

of Emporia, or Henry Allen of Wichita, Kansas. By brother knows Wm. Allen White, the author of "The Martial Adventures of Henry and Me," and he says the book is true, except the love story. Surely this book, besides giving one many a chance to laugh, also shows how the ideals of many Germans at the present time, differ from the Anglo Saxon ideals of men in Kansas. You may be familiar with those ideals as expressed in Mr. Vatralsky's little English poem :

To New Bulgaria.

Bulgaria, beloved conutry mine,
My jealous hopes and dreams do prophesy
Thy weal and blessing, coming, by and by.
A sceptre vastly stretched on land and brine,
The mighty sway of Rome may ne'er be thine,
But knowledge, freedom, virtue, truth, all lie
Within thy reach, as God is God on high,
These make a people great, O Mother mine!

Be lover thou of these! And ever aim
To be among the nations of the earth
A people free, and eminent for worth;
That good men may, observing thy estate,
In admiration glad, with truth exclaim,
"Behold a people small, yet truly great!"

THERE ARE MANY MEN OVER IN BULGARIA WITH SUCH IDEALS, who are causing not only the angels, but also humans like *David Starr Jordan*, to rejoice. Of the numerous instances I can cite only a few. At the time of the Serbian evacuation of Nish an American doctor found himself left alone, with the responsibility for hundreds of invalids. The doctor said that when the Bulgarian army arrived they went right to work to relieve this desperate situation by finding him suitable helpers; he said also, that the Bulgarians posted notices all over the city to the effect that looting of property or abuse of women would be punished by hanging; and that where the Bulgarians had charge, discipline was splendid! Of course I took especial interest in the treatment of prisoners of war. (Are not a part of them our own British Cousins?) I have asked to be allowed to taste the food the captives were carrying. They said it was the same food that the Bulgarian regulars had.

When captives worked for individuals they received either food, lodging and a small money wage, or were paid by the piece and boarded themselves.

A friend of mine had many captives working in his shoe factory which had been requisitioned for the army. This friend praised the Serbs as being the best workmen. He paid them (not counting Sundays) within a lev a day of my own salary. In a big camp of Britons, near Philippopolis, the American missionaries preached regularly on Sundays to the Englishmen. Swiss Y. M. C. A. Secretaries worked for captives of all nationalities. In the hospitals it struck me that captive invalids received a little better attention than the others. But of course as the shortage of food and clothing increases, the fate of the captives is bound to become more and more strenuous along with that of the populace in general. May God shorten the time! Many dear instances came to my notice of friendship between captives and captors. A wounded English Professor (a Lieutenant of the Royal Irish Fusilleers) told me how the commandant of a little railway station slept on the bare boards because he had given up his nice bed to the wounded British officer. One of my old Sunday School boys, a certain Dimiter, is an internationalist, and he comes home on furloughs full of tales of generous deeds he has seen from various people, and he tells us how he too, has tried to help the unfortunate. One horribly hot August day he noticed a wounded young Serbian captive officer suffering greatly from thirst. Water was one's most precious possession just then, but Dimiter gave what he had to the Serb, whose eyes filled as he took off his watch and handed the boy in gratitude. The boy promptly refused the gift saying, "No, Brother, you will need your watch yourself!" (No member of Dimiter's family could afford the luxury of a time piece.) "That Serb was a lovely man and we all liked him," said my old pupil in relating the incident. Last summer a Bulgarian Major sent me his photo, taken with his "guests" (French captives). The French officer in the group exchanged his iron helmet for the Major's foorashka. They also exchanged visiting cards and hoped to look each other up in Paris and Sophia after the war! And so I might go on indefinitely, but will not take your time. You can scarcely imagine how hard it is to know what to select to tell you about, in one letter.

Two years ago I visited the Razlog district. There was a nar-

row-gauge railroad to Gorna Djumia, which they were hoping to extend up to Mehomia, now the county seat. I wish I could tell you of "Nana Marea" (Aunt Mary) Prodonichna's account of King Ferdinand's first visit to Bansko, after the liberation. One woman put her hand on His Majesty's arm and told him to be sure to bring his *wife* next time he came, as everybody wished to see her also!

But those dear people will not see the queen until they too, are called to the Better Land. Last September Sophia was a city of mourning for one who *deserved* the title of "The Mother of the Nation." Her body lay in state for days in the Lutheran Evangelical church in Sophia. Among the multitudes who sought to have a last look at her dear face, there were soldier boys with streaming eyes. There was perfect order as the people passed in single file into the church from Boulevard Dondukoff, and passed out by another door onto a side street. On the day of the funeral it took four hearses to carry the wreaths, although many, many people had given money to the poor instead of sending wreaths. The Queen had asked not to be placed in a mausoleum like a Queen, but to be "placed under the ground, like a soldier," in the ancient cemetery of Tsar Koloyan in Boyana, on an eminence overlooking the capital. The grave is lined with cement, and over it is a flat slab on which is inscribed in Bulgarian,

Eleonora, Queen of the Bulgarians,

Born, Aug. 22, 1861.

Died Sept. 12, 1917.

Then come the words selected by her own sister, Lily, the Princess Elizabeth of Reus; they read:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Owing to the very abnormal situation, little literature about Bulgaria is now available that can be trusted. Mr. Brailsford, a member of the "International Commission to Inquire Into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars," 1912-13, writes quite openly as regards Bulgaria's just claims in the English press. Mr. Noel Buxton, member of the British Parliament and long time President of the Balkan Committee, is also writing. The time will come when more of like literature will be published in America. In the meantime read "Bulgaria and Her Neighbors," by Historicus, and the first chapter of the "Report of the International Commission of

Inquiry into the Balkan Wars," issued by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

I believe you will be glad to hear of Bulgarian women and children whose lives in these times are a series of answers to prayer. SURELY THAT GOD CAN BRING ORDER OUT OF CHAOS AND GOOD OUT OF EVIL, WHO, ALONG WITH THE CLANGOR OF BATTLE, THE SHRIEKING OF SHRAPNEL, AND THE CRIES OF THE WOUNDED, STILL HAS TIME TO HEAR AND ANSWER THE PRAYERS OF DEAR OLD BABA RADA BOYADGIEFF AND LITTLE VENERA EVROFF! And will He not answer, if with pure hearts we here pray for Bulgaria and the dear ones far away? "Bog razbera Bulgarsky ezek!" (God understands the Bulgarian language.)

My Mother and I are living together near Dr. Edward Haskell's family. We all send you greetings and would be glad to hear from any of you, or to see you if your way lies through Oberlin.

Yours for the World—

MARY M. HASKELL,

55 East College Street,
Oberlin, Ohio.

P. S.—You may obtain "Bulgaria and Her Neighbors" from Mr. A. Augilino, 140 Liberty St., New York City.

I feel almost like apologizing for sending you such inadequate glimpses of Bulgaria. THE TIME WILL COME WHEN INTERNATIONAL UNPREJUDICED MEN WITH FIRST HAND KNOWLEDGE CAN GIVE YOU AND THE WORLD FULL AND TRUE PICTURES OF YOUR COUNTRY AND THEN YOU WILL BE COMFORTED, THE WORLD'S JUDGMENT CORRECTED, AND THE DAY OF PEACE HASTENED IN THE BALKANS.

M. M. H.