

SAMOKOV NEWS

AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR BOYS

AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

SAMOKOV, BULGARIA

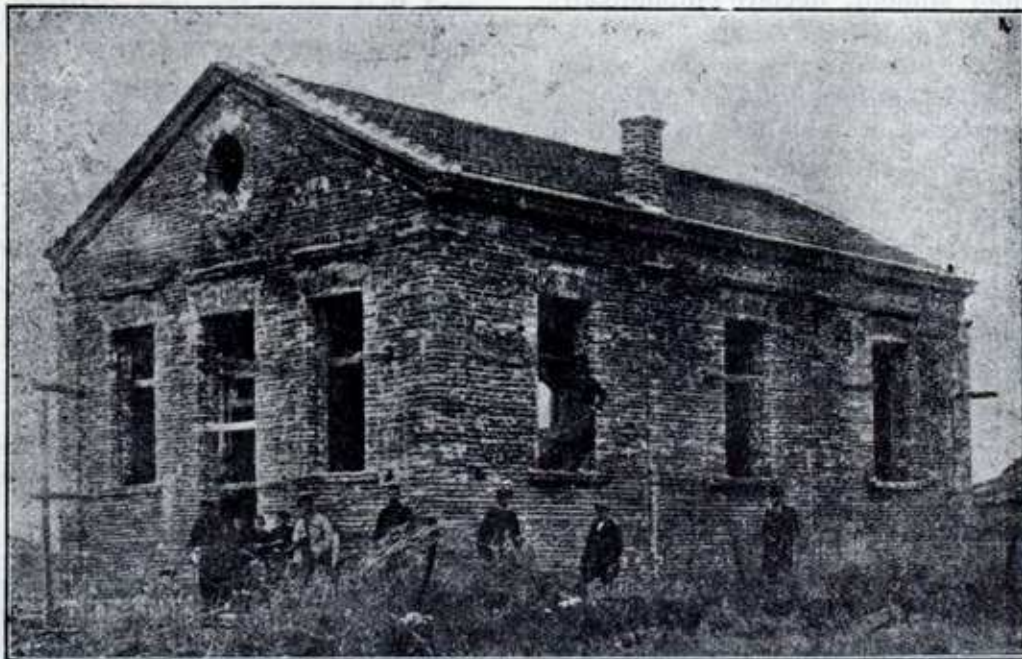
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Altho the purpose of SAMOKOV NEWS is primarily to awaken and sustain the interest of friends in the American Schools at Samokov, it would be unfortunate if we should give the impression that these schools are the only work which the American Board and the Woman's Board of the Interior are carrying on in Bulgaria. We intend, therefore, from time to time to present articles describing the evangelistic, publication, social welfare, kindergarten, woman's work, and other departments of our Mission

activity, which we like to think of as a coördinated whole. The relationship between our schools and the evangelistic work is particularly close, inasmuch as Protestant families naturally send their boys and girls to us for their secondary education, and the schools, in turn, aim primarily to train for Christian leadership and service. It is a significant fact that 17 of the 20 pastors of churches connected with our Mission in Bulgaria received their training in whole or in part at the Samokov school.



VILLAGERS OF PAPAZLI ERECTING THEIR OWN CHURCH BUILDING

Our Evangelistic Work

It was in what was until recently a part of this field that that greatest of all evangelists, St. Paul, began his fateful and fruitful ministry. It is interesting also to

note that half of his pastoral epistles were written to the Balkan Peninsula.

Thinking first of the need of evangelistic effort in Bulgaria today: — Very little religious training is given in the homes, not much in the schools, and the Pravoslav

(Eastern Orthodox) churches have no special work for young people, while almost all of their religious exercises are held, not in the Bulgarian language, but in the little understood old Slavic. Thus, at the most critical period of life, when Christian ideals are most appealing, and character is being fixed, no strong Christian leadership is provided by the State Church. Here and there, however, a priest of vision and earnest faith is doing splendid work. But the vast majority of churches are very thinly attended. They have lost their grip on the people. Their worship is wholly liturgical and mainly formal. Nor are many reading their various religious journals. One seldom travels on the trains or listens long to a group of men in any town without hearing someone, often a High School student, declare emphatically that he is an atheist.

Yet there is a real hunger on the part of the multitudes, a readiness to listen to preaching, as never before. Rev. W. C. Cooper, Sup't. of evangelistic work in our whole Congregational field south of the Balkans, has had crowded halls and close attention in all his meetings. He and his fellow-workers held many open-air services last summer, as we plan to do this summer also. The Ford car and the baby organ, with hearty Gospel songs—both novelties—may have drawn some, but the crisp, incisive, burning messages never failed to hold to the end large numbers. The same experience has followed the stereopticon lectures with temperance slides or scenes from the life of Christ. (Additional slides would be a great help.) Also evangelistic services were held a week or so at a time this past winter in our various churches by both Bulgarians and Americans. Miss Agnes Baird, Superintendent of the work

among women (having nine Bible women under her charge), has given many addresses on various subjects, including "Peace," and has always had the heartiest coöperation of Pravoslavs and Protestants alike. Rarely is there any fanatical opposition.

Rev. Paul Mishkov, who held evangelistic meetings in twelve of the larger Bulgarian cities last year, usually had such meetings in the largest halls in the place, sometimes public buildings freely offered. They were always crowded. Many priests attended regularly. Some later held such meetings themselves. In Kiustendil, a thief confessed, restored his loot, and entered on a new life. In Plöven Mr. Mishkov spoke to 800 High School pupils on Bible study, a number promising to study for themselves thereafter. In Burgas it was said that even the best political speakers had not drawn such crowds for one speech as had regularly attended these religious services for twelve consecutive evenings. And last January our large Philippopolis church was packed to the doors night after night with people of all classes. Other pastors speak of their tours among new villages where in khans [inns] on the way or in solitary Protestant homes they are kept up until midnight talking of the practical, victorious, everyday Christian life. One of them unexpectedly finding over 200 coming to see a Protestant wedding in Macedonia, turned his wedding address into a Gospel sermon, to the pride of the bride and the profit of all. Others have been invited to speak in prisons, while a little work has been done in hospitals and old-folks' homes. Stimulated and guided somewhat by our work in past years, temperance and Y. M. C. A. activities are making notable gains outside of Protestant circles, especially among young people.

The School Choir

Our 32 regular preaching places are scattered all the way from Burgàs on the Black Sea to Kiustendil near the Serbian boundary on the west, and from Pirdòp nestling among the Balkan Mts. on the north to Petrich snuggling up to Mt. Belàsitsa on the Greek frontier. In some places a bare handful of worshipers meets in their own homes; in others, they crowd a special room in the home of a friend; at other places they fill a large church, while three towns look forward eagerly to the building of a new church where there will be more room for expansion. Some have their own pastor. Others have several lay leaders who prepare their sermons and S. S. lessons in their shops or at their plows or after strenuous days in the fields. A number lately have been reading mimeographed sermons prepared by various preachers. From time to time a neighboring pastor visits them, and missionaries as often as the needs of the wide field permit.

Missionaries, preachers, Bible women, colporteurs, and lay workers, all are trying to make each church a power-house for the Holy Spirit, a vantage-ground from which God can make this land a happy part of His own Kingdom of righteousness and peace.

One of the most flourishing of our school activities at present is that of the choir, or choral society, which has a history of forty years or more. Like all organizations, the choir has had its ups and downs, its years of fat and its years of lean. It has enjoyed at least two periods of prosperity before the present one, — from 1882 to 1887, under the direction and inspiration of Rev. W. W. Sleeper, now pastor of a church in Boston, and from 1904 to 1917 under the leadership first of Miss Baird and later of Miss Katsimova. During these periods it did not confine its activity to preparing for the Sunday services, but gave also public concerts consisting of both sacred and secular music.

The present period of renewed prosperity began less than two years ago with the coming of Mr. Leonid Goncharov as our teacher of music and the Russian Language. Mr. Goncharov graduated from the Imperial Music School of Kiev, Russia, in 1893, since which time he has been engaged continuously in teaching the piano, conducting various school and municipal orchestras, and leading choirs. Forced to flee from Russia, we found him as a



SCHOOL CHOIR OF 53 VOICES (MR. GONCHAROV SEATED AT LEFT FRONT)

refugee, playing the piano in a café orchestra in a near-by town, and secured his services at once. Russia's loss is our gain, and from the time of Mr. Goncharov's arrival the musical activities in our school have been picking up and gaining momentum.

It is surprising what difficult music our boys and girls can sing, with very little technical knowledge of either music or singing. Many scarcely read the notes, but depend largely upon the ear. Yet they sing with remarkable accuracy such complicated things as Mozart's "Twelfth Mass," the Hallelujah Chorus, Schubert's "The Lord is My Shepherd," and "Where Thou Reignest," Henry Smart's "Te Deum," and some of the unusual Russian church music of Bortnyanski, Chaikovski, Grechaninov, and Kalinikov.

Of course, a choir is not made in a day, or in a month, or even in a year, and it was fully a year before ours began to show something of the team-work and expressiveness characteristic of a trained choir. Much still remains to be done along those lines, but the choir has already reached the point where it consistently sings not only "acceptably" but with real effectiveness. It is safe to say that it has added greatly to the attractiveness of the Sunday services.

It is an interesting fact that our Bulgarian boys and girls show very decided preference for the best classical composers, such as Mozart, Beethoven, Händel, Schubert, Gounod, and Chaikovski, and soon tire of the "pretty" and somewhat saccharine music of English composers such as Stainer, Alfred Gaul, and H. R. Shelley. Their musical taste is undoubtedly higher than that of American boys and girls of corresponding ages.

On the other hand, their voices, tho rich and fresh, show an unfortunate tenden-

cy toward harshness. Again, the extreme individualism of the people makes teamwork of any kind especially difficult. To sink the individual in the welfare of the whole seems to be a brand-new idea to most of our students, and that is just why we encourage and emphasize group activities such as athletic games, student organizations, and the choir. If thru the choir we can develop not only musical taste and ability but also team-work and group loyalty, we shall be accomplishing something even more valuable for our students than the preparation of choice sacred music for the Sunday services.

Bulgaria's Agrarian Government

Between five and six million Bulgarians live in the Balkan Peninsula. Four million of them live in Bulgaria along with another half million Turks, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Rumanians, and gypsies.

Most of the Bulgarians are farmers. They live in small villages, and in a rather primitive way cultivate small fields of which they themselves are the owners. Most of those who are not farmers are artisans, and work in their own shoe shops, carpenter shops, tin shops, brick kilns and the like. Most of the Bulgarians are middle-class people, rather poor but independent. This social condition gives them a good deal of initiative and daring. They are all very rapidly learning to read and write. They are eager to learn of everything new, ardent to find out about modern movements, and daring enough to make the boldest experiments.

One of the boldest experiments the Bulgarians have made so far was to entrust

their government to the radical Agrarian party. A long time ago some of the Bulgarian villagers got the idea that a nation, four-fifths of which were villagers, should be governed by villagers. So the Agrarian party was formed. It has been carrying on its propaganda among the peasants for more than twenty years. During that time Stamboliski came to the front. He is a real "dirt farmer," a peasant from Central Bulgaria. His old father and mother still live on the farm.

By 1912, the year when Bulgaria entered on a long series of disastrous wars, the Agrarians had become one of the strongest parties in Parliament, tho they were still in the minority. Stamboliski vigorously opposed Bulgaria's entering the World War on the side of Germany, and for his opposition was kept in prison during the greater part of the war. He was released in 1918

When things began to go badly with the Central Powers, and when King Ferdinand abdicated, Stamboliski became one of the ministers in a coalition cabinet. Later he became prime minister in a purely Agrarian government, which position he has held for more than three years.

During that time his power and the power of his party have steadily grown. With every new election the number of his supporters has greatly increased, until, as a result of the recent elections, the Agra-

rian party has 212 representatives in the National Assembly out of a total of 248. No other governing party in the world has such a huge majority in parliament. And all these men are Stamboliski's personal supporters. In other words, Stamboliski's government is more solidly intrenched in Bulgaria than ever before. He says that they are going to rule for 40 years, which is not very probable.

What have these farmers done to Bulgaria during the three years they have been in control? They have settled the matter of reparations in a way very favor-

able to the country. They have kept the Bulgarian money fairly stable. They have gotten Bulgaria into the League of Nations. They have loyally fulfilled the stipulations of the peace treaty. They have established good relations with all their Balkan neighbors. They have built new roads and railroads.

They have improved the educational system and put up lots of new schools. They have reduced the army to the lowest possible dimensions. They have given special encouragement to writers and artists. They called a church council to reform the church. They are taking property away from monasteries and giving it to the villagers to cultivate. They punished the men responsible for the wars. They have taken a good deal of the ill-gotten wealth away from



A HORO IN FULL SWING

the war profiteers. They have cleaned Bulgarian politics of all imperialistic aspirations.

Bulgaria, under the present government, has "come back" far faster than any other power in Central or Eastern Europe.

Boy Scout Troop

The Boy Scout movement is a comparatively new thing in Bulgaria. Outside of the well-organized Russian scouts, of whom there are 300 in the country—exiles from their fatherland—there are only four troops in all Bulgaria. Ours is one of the four.

The A. S. B. Troop was organized in the autumn of 1921 under peculiar difficulties. We were long on enthusiasm but short on experience. Fortunately, one of our new boys was a First Class Scout fresh from Robert College, Constantinople. Another was a Russian First Class Scout.

But with the opening of this school-year, more serious work has been attempted. 15 boys have passed their Second Class tests and are preparing for the First Class. The Troop now consists of 24 boys—12 Bulgarian, 8 Russian, and 4 American—divided into three patrols, as follows: "Wolf," Patrol Leader, Eddie Haskell; "Flying Eagle," P. L. Oliver Haskell; and "Lion," P. L. Eugene Prostop. For four consecutive Saturdays before the Easter recess we held inter-patrol contests in knot-tying, signaling, the compass, first aid, and cooking. The winning patrol was to be treated to a Troop "banquet" set up by the losing patrols. As it turned out, however, "Wolf" and "Flying Eagle" each won two of the four contests, and as we thought that the S. P. C. A. might intervene if "Lion" were made to foot the bill alone, "Wolf" and "Flying Eagle" generously agreed to share half of the expense. The "banquet" was held in a separate little dining-room opening off the main dining-hall, and included such Bulgarian delicacies as *boza* (a drink made of millet) and *halva* (a confection made of sesame seeds



THE BOY SCOUT SMILE

One of our American instructors had a Scout-master's certificate. So we went at it.

During the first year little was accomplished beyond passing the Tenderfoot tests, obtaining uniforms, and winnowing out considerable chaff in the membership.

and sugar). It was voted a success, and since that time the Troop has adopted the little dining-room as its own, using it also for Troop and Patrol meetings. The walls have been suitably decorated, and a notice-board gives the latest scout news from all over the world. Every night

at supper-time each scout reports to the Scout-master the good turn or turns that he has done during the day, and a record of these is posted on the board.

22 boys have joined the World Brotherhood sponsored by "Boys' Life," the Scout magazine, and now correspond—in English—with boys all over the world,—from India to Argentina, and from Hawaii to West Africa. Incidentally, the large amount of this spontaneous correspondence from our school attracted the attention of one of the editors of "Boys' Life," who has asked us for an article. Thus Samokov is now on the Scout map.

One of Our Teachers

Among the teachers of long standing on the staff of our Samokov schools, none has been more helpful in bringing them to their present position in the country than Mr. Alexander Koulev.



MR. KULEV

Though Bulgarian by race, he was born and educated in Bessarabia, Russia, his higher education having been begun in the University of Moscow and completed in the Imperial University of New Russia, in Odessa. Then followed ten years of teaching and fifteen years of work as principal of high schools in two important Bulgarian cities. His specialties are Chemistry and the Natural Sciences, and he has compiled text-books in zoölogy, botany, physiology, and hygiene, as well as translated similar works from the German, which have been extensively used.

In 1906, on the occasion of the birthday of the Bulgarian ruler, then Prince Ferdinand, Mr. Koulev was decorated with the "National Order of Civilian Service." He has several times served on County School Boards, and was twice elected to the Supreme Educational Council. At the conclusion of twenty-five years in the National Schools, he retired from their service, in 1911, and accepted an invitation to fill a vacancy in our teaching staff the following year.

From the first, Mr. Koulev identified himself most heartily with the aims of the school, and during the time when adjustment of program was made and recognition of the diploma sought, his experience in the details of the relations between schools and the Ministry of Education was at our disposal and proved most helpful. In addition to his teaching ability, his expert knowledge of the office work of a school in this land of red tape, and his command of four European languages beside his own—French, German, Russian, and Rumanian—make his services to the schools invaluable. Mr. Koulev possesses in highest degree the qualities of accuracy, tact, and devotion to his work, and with unfailing courtesy is ready to respond to any demand on his time or patience. We hope that his connection with the schools may remain unbroken for many years to come.

NOTICE

Some of our readers have asked us about subscribing for SAMOKOV NEWS. We take this opportunity of saying that SAMOKOV NEWS is sent gratis to two classes of people,—those who are already friends of the American Schools at Samokov, and those whom we hope to interest in them. If you are already in the first group, you are welcome to the paper regularly. If there is no chance of your joining the growing number of those interested in these schools, we hope you will be frank enough to tell us, so that we may give your copy to someone else.

One thing more. We hope to keep enlarging the circle of friends of the Samokov Schools. Won't you cooperate with us by passing SAMOKOV NEWS around among your friends, and then sending us the names and addresses of those who are particularly interested? Thank you.]

News Notes

Mr. Dimitar Nedelkov, former teacher in A. S. B., and Mr. Paul Hristov '21, who have spent a year and a half in Scotland studying theology, have returned to Bulgaria on holiday.

*

The Senior classes of both schools were in Sofia March 29th to April 3rd on an educational trip, under the guidance of three teachers. They visited the power-house which supplies half of Sofia with lighting, the wireless telegraph station, a soap factory belonging to former students of our school, the sugar factory, the Meteorological Museum, the Royal Zoological Museum, and the National University, where the professors of physics and chemistry were good enough to perform and explain certain very interesting experiments with X-ray, electro-magnet, and other apparatus which our modest school laboratories do not boast. It is hoped that the Senior spring trip to Sofia will become an established custom.

*

The Easter recess lasted from April 3rd to 14th, so as to include the Pravoslav (Orthodox) Easter, which this year was the 8th. Labor Week followed immediately, thus giving the American teachers an unusually long period for rest or travel. Misses Abbott, Snyder, and Meebold made good use of this time, Miss Abbott going to Constantinople, Miss Snyder to Athens and Constantinople, and Miss Meebold to Athens and Rome.

*

During the Easter recess we received a visit from Miss Jane Button, Y. W. C. A. secretary in Rumania, who addressed our boys and girls, about a hundred of whom remained over the vacation. Miss Button brought greetings from the Rumanian Associations, and pled for closer relations between the young people of Rumania and Bulgaria.

*

Mr. Alexiev, general secretary of the Y. M. C. A. in Bulgaria, about whom we had an article in the last number of SAMOKOV NEWS, visited the schools April 21st to 23rd, giving two addresses under the auspices of our Y. M. and Y. W. societies. His themes were, "The Present Psychological Condition of Society" and "The New Way."

*

The schools had the pleasure of a 24-hour visit from the Misses Sprague, Y. W. workers in

Detroit and Toledo, who are on a tour of the world, and are especially interested in schools. They had been eight months on the way, having visited Japan, China, the Philippines, Burma, India, Egypt, Greece, Italy, and Yugoslavia. On the evening of their short stay, Miss Florence Sprague was so good as to address our Sunday evening congregation on her experiences and impressions of the various foreign peoples which they had visited. Her talk was unusually vivid and helpful. We were interested, by the way, to hear Miss Sprague remark after the service, at which our school choir sang Stainer's "Fling wide the gates!" that she had not heard any singing equal to that in the eight months since she had left home.

*

May Day is an old, established holiday in Bulgaria, as in England. The Communists adopted it for their day of labor parades and speeches. Thereupon the Ministry of Education ordered that all schools shall observe the holiday, but that the entire school body shall go on an excursion far from the madding crowd. As usual, our schools went up to Cham-koria, a summer resort six miles up in a pine forest. The chief event of the day, after a picnic lunch, was a general and unusually lively *horò* (see illustration), which lasted until showers drove us home late in the afternoon.

*

Some of our readers may be interested in the fluctuations of the Bulgarian franc, or *lev*, since the war, altho they are not nearly so sensational as those of the German *Mark* or the Austrian *Krone*. A *lev*, pre-war, was worth 19.4 cents,—that is, you get 5.15 of them in exchange for a dollar. Now you get 130 *levs* for a dollar, or 25 times as many. But the cost of living has also jumped about 20 times, so that the dollar does not actually buy very much more now than it did in 1914. At the end of the war the *lev* was worth half its gold value. After that it zigzagged downward to 189 to the dollar in November, 1921, the lowest it has ever reached. Since then it has been climbing slowly and irregularly to its present rate of 130 to the dollar.