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# SAMOKOV NEWS

AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR BOYS

AMERICAN SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

*SAMOKOV, BULGARIA*

VOL. I

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No. 1

## *At Present*

Nature smiled at the opening of the sixty-third year of the American Schools in Samokov this fall and produced several weeks of incomparable weather—weather to be found only in the clear air of this altitude of 3000 feet. To the south tower

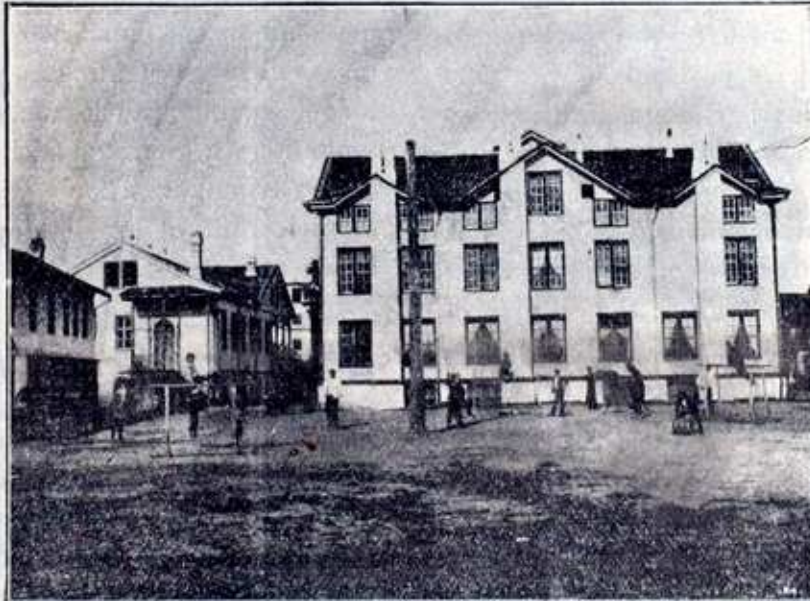
the peaks of the Rila range to the height of 9000 feet, on which the fresh snow shimmers in the morning sun above the mist-streaked valleys, and with the deepening colors on the mountain side tell us that the serious work of the year is at

hand. The students gather from all quarters of Bulgaria, from Macedonia and from as far away as the Caucasus, and such is the jollification on reaching the familiar campus and in meeting old friends that it reminds one of Old Home Week in an American town. Even the few inevi-

table homesick among the new ones soon conform to the general tone, and after the reception in their honor little is seen or heard of any desire to leave.

The total enrollment is 301, of whom 136 boys seriously strain the capacity of the 'Boys' School, while 165 girls are possible only by renting a large building adjoining their end of the campus.

With the return of Mr. Ostrander, who resumes his work as principal of the Boys' School, Mr. Rowland remains as head of the English department, Dr. Haskell has charge of the religious course, and



THE PLAYGROUND OF THE BOYS' SCHOOL

Mr. Stearns, newly-arrived, makes the fourth American on the teaching force. Ten able Bulgarians complete the personnel of the Boys' School. The Girls' School is fortunate in having this year the services of seven American teachers and eight Bulgarians, so that the combined teaching force consists of 29



men and women, of whom 11 are American and 18 Bulgarian. Experience has shown the advisability of having some of the classes contain both boys and girls, so that an interchange of teachers between the two schools is frequent. A school physician makes his daily round, supplementing his work at intervals by lectures on hygiene, while a nurse in each school attends to minor disabilities and carries out his orders.

For years one of the aims of our schools has been to give the English language a more important place than was possible under the government curriculum. During 1921, the missionary representative of the school in Sofia, the late Mr. Woodruff, seriously and insistently took up the matter with the Minister of Education, with the result that in May of that year permission was granted by the government to teach all subjects in English with the exception of Bulgarian language and literature and Bulgarian history and geography. Because of the small amount of English at the command of the students, it was impossible to introduce such a program at once, but by emphasizing the study of the language to the extent of 12 hours a week in the beginning class it is hoped that within a few years our ideal will be realized.

As the government is adding largely to the number of its grade schools, there is less pressure on us to meet that need, so the three classes preparatory to high school are being dropped, one a year, till only five will remain, corresponding, as indicated above, to the four high school years plus one of college work, which is the requisite for entrance to a European university. The government has given the supreme test of confidence in our institu-

tions by permitting not only the enlargement of the English department but by giving a free hand in the curriculum, which may now be laid down on the best American lines—always adapted to Bulgarian conditions and needs.

This great opportunity, however, is met by an equipment nearing the conclusion of a half century of wear and tear. Chimneys lean, walls bulge, floors sag, and in spite of constant repair we live in fear that the government inspector may actually close us down as unsafe. The increasing tide of applicants forces us to refuse each year as many new students as we can accept. A corporate member of the American Board, after visiting the school this summer, wrote to his colleagues, "The buildings and plant are well-nigh a ruin and a disgrace to the Board." The beautiful new site on the outskirts of Sofia, however, gives us strength to struggle on a little longer amid present inconveniences and limitations, firm in the faith that the friends of the Samokov schools will not fail them in their time of greatest opportunity and hence of greatest need.

### *The Boys' School in the Past*

In the middle of the nineteenth century Bulgaria was an almost unknown name in western Europe and America, as the nation had practically lost its identity through subjugation to the Turks. But American missionaries in Constantinople saw attractive possibilities in this down-trodden race, and in the late fifties religious work was begun among them under Methodist and Congregational auspices.

Just about this time an English lady, Miss Marston, offered to give £300 sterling for the education of Bulgarian



boys, and the missionaries of the American Board in Bulgaria were asked to undertake the work. This was a very inviting field to enter, for the Bulgarians had shown, even in those dark days of political and religious oppression, a passionate longing for education and a readiness to make great sacrifices to obtain it. So the missionaries at once embraced the offered opportunity, and, in October 1860, opened a school at Philippopolis, attended at first by two pupils and later in the year by four. There was no special building; the pupils lived with the missionaries and did their school work in one of their large

rooms, paying their way by various kinds of manual labor. There were practically no textbooks available in Bulgarian, so the missionaries were compelled to meet this need. During the long

vacations the students were sent out on tours in pairs to circulate the Bible and other Christian literature, — a timely and welcome activity because of a renewed interest among the people in the suppressed and half-forgotten Bulgarian language. The school continued to grow, until at the end of nine years it numbered over thirty; but in 1869 it was temporarily closed.

Work was resumed in Stara Zagora, but this city proved to be very unhealthy because of malarial marshes, and after a year the school was removed to Samokov, a city with fine water and a healthy climate.

This was a period of great political excitement and radical changes. In 1876 occurred the insurrection against the Turks and the subsequent massacres which so shocked the western world and aroused the outspoken indignation of Mr. Gladstone. Then came the Russo-Turkish war, with the final defeat of the Turks and the liberation of Bulgaria. A new era had dawned, and it seemed necessary to change the character of the American School. A gradual extension of the course has followed, culminating in the adding of the 8th class, with a diploma recognized by the government.

It has always been the effort of the

school to develop industry and self-reliance in its pupils. Many, many of them have been extremely poor. Some walked long, weary distances to get to the school and arrived penni-

less, but with such a firm determination to get an education that they were ready to do any kind of work and accept any conditions of living if they could only be received as students. Such were not disappointed, and many of them not only proved to be very satisfactory scholars in the school, but later on graduated from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Hamilton, and other American colleges. For the benefit of such boys, all the work connected with the school which could possibly be entrusted to them was put into their hands. They cared for the buildings and grounds, they



THE FIRST HOME OF THE SCHOOL AT SAMOKOV



sawed, chopped, and carried wood, they dug and planted gardens, they cared for the horses and cows of various families. But such sources of work proved only too inadequate for the numerous applicants, and to meet the growing need, Dr. and Mrs. House, and later Dr. Kingsbury and Mr. Thomson, founded and developed two industrial shops in the nature of a self-help department. In 1885 a printing office was begun in a very humble way, which later developed until it was able to handle not only the printing necessary for the schools but also the publications of the Mission, including tracts, religious books, textbooks, hymn books and even parts of the Bible. Here, under the direction of skilled superintendents, scores of boys and young men have worked in their free time, and have both helped to a very considerable degree to support themselves in the school and obtained a knowledge of a profitable trade, which has been of great practical value to them later on in life. Likewise the carpentry shop, established the following year (1886), has been of great service, both in making and repairing furniture for the school and in keeping the buildings in repair and also in helping and training the youths who have worked in it. Many times the annual exhibit of the handiwork of the pupils has been the subject of well-deserved admiration and praise.

When, in 1878, the Turks left town in great numbers, a site of about four acres was obtained in the center of the city on the main street, and here the corner-stone of the first school building was laid in 1879. Then came the building for the industrial department and another accessory one, while the "new" building was begun in 1890 and erected with the aid of the students, both financial and manual. It is

substantially constructed of brick and stone, and aside from a dormitory and several classrooms contains a large, attractive study-hall and assembly room used for public lectures and entertainments, and also houses the boarding department. Besides these four buildings, devoted exclusively to the needs of the school, there are also missionary residences in the same compound, or campus, which have been called upon many times to accommodate an overflow of students.

Such, in briefest outline, is the history of the American School for Boys during the past 62 years. The constant aim and effort have been to give the students a thoro educational training combined with practical moral and religious instruction, to encourage them to have a personal and vital faith in Christ, and to prepare them to go out into the world as useful citizens among their people, — sound-thinking, conscientious, industrious, and independent in spirit. Almost without exception, the preachers of the churches in the Bulgarian and Macedonian fields of the Mission have received their general and theological training, in whole or in part, in this school, while scores of other pupils have taken positions of prominence and trust as lawyers, doctors, teachers, merchants, and army officers. These men, both preachers and laymen, have been active and effective in initiating and supporting social, moral, and religious reforms thruout the country, and in general have been recognized as sterling and conscientious citizens, with a stamp peculiarly their own.

The school has drawn its students from all parts of Bulgaria and Macedonia, — from the borders of Albania to Varna and the Dobrudja, and from Vidin on the Danube to Dedeagach on the Ægean. During its three score years it has shared



the nation's varied and ever-changing experiences in this troubled part of the world,—the blight of subjugation to a foreign tyranny, the exultation of liberation and victories, the horrors and sufferings of massacres, insurrection, war, and famine, and pride and satisfaction in the many really remarkable achievements of the Peasant State during its forty years of freedom.

Today the school stands high in the esteem and even in the affection of the people and the official classes, who, knowing what it has done in the past in spite of many limitations, wish and expect it to do even greater things for the country in the years that lie before it.

## *The Future*

The American Schools at Samokov are standing today at the threshold of a new era in their history. The removal of both schools (Boys' and Girls') to Sofia, the capital, has definitely been decided upon and approved by the two missionary boards which support them. A splendid new site of 100 acres, lying five miles outside the city, has been found. The negotiations for the purchase of this site have not yet been completed, but are progressing very satisfactorily. We hope to be able to announce early in the new year that the site is definitely ours. In these negotiations, as well as in every other contact which the schools have recently had with the government, the authorities—from the King and Prime Minister down—have proved themselves extremely friendly and eager to help.

*Why move?* Because, despite all the natural beauties of its situation, Samokov is no longer a strategic place for an Ame-

rican mission school, and because our buildings are in a state of such delapidation and overcrowding that a new school plant is a positive necessity in any event. If, therefore, we *must* move, common sense urges moving to a more central location.

When, in 1872, the schools were located at Samokov, there were no railroads anywhere in Bulgaria. Sofia was a down-in-the-heel Turkish village, — a straggling collection of mud houses. With the coming of the railroad, however, and the transfer of the capital, Sofia has become in fifty years the intellectual and cultural center of the whole country. Meanwhile, Samokov, with no railway anywhere near, has merely marked time, and is now an isolated mountain town of 10,000 inhabitants, with little cultural life. Hence the desirability, since we must build anyhow, of moving to a more central and stimulating location.

*The new site.* The site for which we are negotiating lies out in the open country on a bluff facing Mt. Vitosha, which rises to the south of Sofia. Five miles to the north-west is seen the capital, the golden dome of its splendid new cathedral gleaming in the sunlight. Across a broad, fertile valley to the north, and extending eastward as far as the eye can reach, stretches the magnificent Balkan range, the Stara Planina, as the Bulgarians lovingly call it. Here, amid the still beauties of Nature, where the clamor of the city cannot reach, we dream of building a model American school for this sturdy Balkan people.

*Is it not too far from the city?* We think not. A railroad is expected to run close by the site in the near future. This and the school auto will bring the cultural advantages of the city within easy reach. On the other hand, the city is far enough



away so that our boys and girls will be protected from its distractions. It is not our purpose to receive day-pupils from the city. We shall be a boarding school, similar in this respect to some of our best American preparatory schools which are located away from the cities.

*What sized school are we planning for?* Speaking only for the Boys' School (the next number of our news letter will be devoted especially to the Girls' School), we are planning to provide dormitory accommodations for 200 boys. We do not believe in large numbers. We prefer to concentrate on a smaller number of pupils, and to bring to bear upon them all the good influences at our command, rather than to spread our influence thin, so to speak, over a larger number.

*What grade will the school be?* The Boys' School will be a full "gymnasium" course of five years, corresponding to our High School course plus the first year of college. The first three years will be a general course with the same subjects required of all. For the last two years it is probable that we shall offer the students a choice of the following courses: (1) an academic course, emphasizing the humanities (2) a scientific course, leading to engineering, medicine, etc., and (3) a business and commercial course.

*What is our aim?* What kind of graduates do we propose to turn out? We aim to turn out well-equipped intellectual, moral, and spiritual leaders for Bulgaria. Everything else is secondary and subsidiary. We want a model school plant, but only to help us turn out Christian leaders for the country. We want the very best teachers available — both American and Bulgarian — but only because without

them we cannot train our boys to be leaders. If we fail to produce such leaders, we have failed in everything. If, however, we can turn out several such leaders every year, we shall be accomplishing our purpose.

*What buildings are necessary for the new plant in Sofia?* The Boys' School alone will need three buildings, besides residences for missionaries and teachers.

1. A Dormitory, with classrooms and a study-hall.
2. A second Dormitory with classrooms and a dining-room.
3. An Industrial Department, containing the printing and carpentry shops.

In addition to these exclusively Boys' School buildings, we shall share two other buildings with the Girls' School.

1. An Administration Building with the principal's office, faculty and reception rooms, and an auditorium large enough to accommodate both schools and a certain number of visitors. This building would also contain the library and some classrooms for mixed classes.

2. A Science Hall and Gymnasium combined. This would contain the physics, chemistry, and biology laboratories and the museum.

These buildings are still "castles in Spain." We hope to make them realities in Bulgaria! We believe we are planning for nothing extravagant, nothing luxurious, nothing which is not dictated by sound common sense and by our actual needs. But we do want our new school, when we build, to be a model for Bulgaria and a worthy representative of Christian America. That is what the Bulgarian government and people expect of us. Are we going to measure up to the opportunity?



## Student Organizations

Student organizations create school-spirit, bring out latent powers of leadership, and teach the boys the value of team-work. Therefore we believe in them, — a limited number of them. At A. S. B. we have nine.

1. **Razvitiye** ("Self-Development") A literary society now in its 25th year, — the oldest and perhaps most influential in the school. Membership this year 79. Weekly meetings, with declamations, reading of essays, debates, orations, music, reading of MS. periodical "Zhilo," and critique. Last year the society presented Shakspeare's "Taming of the Shrew" (in Bulgarian) four times. This year already rehearsing for Goethe's "Egmont." Holds prize competition at end of year. Possesses library of 700 volumes.

2. **Y. M. C. A.** Membership 35. Holds meetings Sunday afternoons, sometimes jointly with Y. W. C. A. Meetings addressed by faculty and outside speakers. Talks on social questions most popular. Sometimes boys themselves lead. Occasional debates. Last year presented dramatization of book of Job. At Christmas time the members go from house to house in the town singing carols and collecting money for charitable purposes. Collects old clothes and buys and saws wood for distribution among the very poor during the coldest parts of the winter. Arranges "Fathers and Sons" meetings to which are invited families of day-pupils. Visits sick in hospitals. Plans to offer course in organ playing to train future church organists. Faculty adviser, Mr. Stearns.

3. **Nedelna Beseda** ("Sunday Circle") An organization for the younger boys up to 15 years of age. Meets in Mrs. Ostrander's home and under her guidance Sunday afternoons. Membership 25. Activities consist of reading of stories, debates, playing of games, walks, and giving of entertainments.

4. **Sport Club.** An athletic association started last year, entirely under student management. Club has made its own football and baseball field. Membership 46. Daily football practise during the fall season. This autumn five interclass games of (association) football were

played, the IV class winning the series. The Club is rehearsing Shakspeare's "Othello" for public presentation during this month to raise funds. Next spring proposes to organize baseball and basketball teams.

5. **Boy Scouts.** The Troop at A. S. B. comprises three patrols of 8 boys each, — "Flying Eagle," "Lion," and "Wolf." Keen competition between the patrols. Two overnight hikes already this season to Cham-koria, the beautiful pine forest six miles up in the mountains. Scouts are now taking their 2nd Class tests. Scoutmaster, Mr. Rowland.

6. **Rilski Shepot** ("Rila Mountain. Whisper") The school paper, established last year. 10 monthly issues of 8 pages each, with illustrations. Contains editorials, news items, articles on school life of special interest to graduates, and original essays and poems of sometimes high literary order.

7. **Church Choir.** Under the skilled leadership of Mr. Goncharov, our Russian teacher of music, the mixed choir of 60 voices is taking rapid strides forward. During the present school-year the choir is giving parts of Mozart's "Twelfth Mass," Gaul's "Holy City," Stainer's "Crucifixion," choruses from "Messiah," and various anthems from Schubert, Gounod, Chaikovski, Grechaninov, and others. Has already given two public concerts jointly with the orchestra.

8. **Orchestra.** Again under the leadership of Mr. Goncharov, the school orchestra, founded a year ago, is now in a flourishing condition. Consists of 15 instruments, — 6 first violins, 5 second violins, cello, bass-viol, piano, and organ. Takes part in public concerts and in entertainments given by the various other student organizations.

9. **Student Council.** Also inaugurated last year. Part student self-government and part advisory council to the Principal. Consists of seven boys representing all the classes. Meets regularly once a week with the Principal and one representative of the faculty to discuss any and all questions relating to the school life of the students. Cases of discipline may be turned over to it at the discretion of the Principal. The Student Council is a feature of great significance and growing influence in the school.



## News Notes

A hearty welcome was given to Mr. and Mrs. Ostrander and Miss Edith Douglass, returning from furlough, as well as to Miss Snyder, who comes for two years of English teaching, and Mr. Stearns, Harvard '22, who enters upon a tutorship of three years.

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This year we have 18 Russians in our schools,—10 boys and 8 girls. Seventeen of these are supported by Professor Whittemore's American Committee for the Relief and Education of Russian Youth.

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Our mission circle has been gladdened by the acquisition of a new Ford touring car, the money for which was contributed by friends of the Ostranders in Lyons, N. Y. and Brockton, Mass. Cordial thanks to the generous donors.

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In connection with the recent Compulsory Labor Law introduced by Premier Stambouliski, the Minister of Education worked out a similar program for all school-children. Each fall and spring the pupils leave their books for a week to work in the open. This year perfect weather and good spirits prevailed during the whole of Labor Week. Under the direction of teachers, boys and girls cleaned the streets of Samokov, worked in school and City Hospital gardens, and did some calsumining about the school buildings. In addition, the boys cleared ground for trees at the County Nursery, built fences, repaired walls, and prepared and laid 100 yards of macadam on the Sofia road, while the girls did various sorts of indoor cleaning.

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One of the first Friday evenings of the term, the school paper, *Rilski Shepot*, was launched for the year with great enthusiasm. Radev, the editor-in-chief, presented the matter to the students, nearly all of whom subscribed on the spot. For the first time this year the orchestra made its appearance and was well received.

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The first week in October both schools hiked up to Cham-koria, a summer resort in the mountains about six miles from Samokov. The weather was perfect and everyone was in high spirits. Before dinner the girls played running games, and the boys football, while after dinner, to the accompaniment of an accordion, practically everyone — teachers and students — joined in the strenuous but graceful folk-dancing.

On the evening of Oct. 6, in the Kindergarten Building in Sofia, about 100 former students, graduates, and teachers of the two American Schools in Samokov, met to give a reception to the newly-arrived and returned missionaries. Other guests of honor were Miss Abbott, principal of the Girls' School, and Mr. and Mrs. Markham. The evening was pleasantly spent in singing English songs and in listening to short, pithy speeches from the guests of honor.

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The idea came to Miss Pavlova, one of our teachers, to present to the students the suffering of the Greek refugee boys and girls from Asia Minor. With the hearty approval of both principals, she gave a chapel talk, on successive mornings, to the two schools. A very effective story, "Coals of Fire," which preceded her appeal brought a generous response. Altogether the teachers and pupils of the two schools collected a sum of 3800 *levs*, or about \$25. The Greek Consul General, to whom the money was handed was not only grateful, but touched.

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On Monday evening, October 16, the Teachers' Club held its first meeting of the year and elected officers. Miss Douglass introduced her new Edison, which was greatly enjoyed by all. On the evening of November sixth, the second meeting was held. Miss Abbott, Miss Pavlova, and Dr. Haskell, who attended this summer the conference of the Fellowship of Reconciliation at Sontagsburg, Austria, gave their impressions of the conference. Refreshments and a social time followed.

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On Saturday evening, Nov. 11, the school orchestra and mixed choir gave their first public concert of the year. The program consisted of selections from "Rigoletto" and from "Carmen" played by the orchestra, between which the choir sang four parts of Mozart's "Twelfth Mass." The playing of "Rigoletto" was especially effective, and reflects high credit on the orchestra, which was organized barely a year ago.

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A prominent English business man of Sofia recently said to the principal of the Boys' School,— "I find your boys very satisfactory. There is a great difference between them and the other Bulgarian young men who work for us. Your graduates are much more conscientious and ready to work for the benefit of their employers and not merely for their own personal interests. We can trust them with responsibility."

*SAMOKOV NEWS* in its first issue greets the many friends of the schools, and, in bi-monthly form, hopes to keep them in touch with our activities and plans for the future.