

WE TAKE PLEASURE IN PRESENTING TO OUR READERS THIS LETTER FROM RUSSIA

Written by a Former Most Appreciated Resident of Fairhope, Well Known Throughout Baldwin County, as is Her Husband.

Sukhum, Abkhazia, USSR.
January 6, 1936

My Dear Rose Kamper:

I have just finished my breakfast of cornmeal cakes with honey, sausages and tea, all produced in Russia, and now, I propose to have a little chat with you.

Melville has gone out to visit a grape-fruit orchard. He gets about on a wheel, and I walk. We miss our little old Ford, but it is probably just as well. Walking is good for the health, and one can enjoy the landscape more fully, and observe people more closely. It is the most popular mode of travel here. There are a few motor cars, no family pleasure cars. The collective farms, sovkozoes, and holkozoes all have motor trucks to bring their produce to town; big autobusses serve for transportation to outlying districts, and the one-horse droshky,—izvoshchik—carries fares about the city.

These old-world vehicles are still a curiosity to me. Some have one narrow seat for passengers, protected by a top scooping far forward, but in most of them, the passengers sit under a flat canopy, on a pad spread upon the floor, letting their feet rest on a step outside. The driver rides on an elevated seat in front. The horses, well kept and well-treated, never travel very fast, and are harnessed with wooden yokes arching high above their necks. Many of the passengers I have seen enjoying the comforts of these carriages, are manifestly happy from vodka, whose legs have refused to carry them in proper dignity, over the stony streets.

The out-of-doors is wonderfully alluring today. The sea is all-ashimmer with sunlight, and a soft blue haze hangs over the mountains. The sky is blue unclouded and the whole world beckons me to come out into the warm sunshine. When Melville returns, we shall probably go for a tramp, as this is Rest Day.

Here, the week has six days only: Rest Day, followed by five work days. This makes five weeks to the month, with an occasional day extra, the thirty-first, which is used as an extra work day. You cannot imagine how difficult it is for us to keep track of our American calendar. Instead of Monday, Tuesday, etc., the days are designated by number, as in the Friends' calendar. Although religion is not encouraged by the Soviet government, there are still some old churches

here in Sukhum, where services are held on Sunday, and when we hear the church bells ringing, we say: "This must be Sunday."

Abkhazia, although a part of the Soviet Union, is not Russian, and the people still cling to many of their age-old customs. Abkhazian history interests me greatly. The old days were days of reckless adventure, of quick drawing of swords, and fierce tribal warfare. The people, fiery in temperament and lovers of good wines from their own vineyards, are a sturdy, hardy race, many living more than the hundred year span. In native costume, they are striking and picturesque. On the street, I frequently meet men wearing the long coat of coarse wool with skirts flowing to the ankles, sometimes, even sweeping the ground. Trim boots of soft black leather fit close and neat up to the knee. Across the chest, are rows of ivory capped cartridges. From the narrow belt of hand-wrought silver dangle a sword or dagger, and several ornamental purses of silver and leather. The high turban made of curly black sheep's wool often gives glimpses of bright red on the top.

Abkhazians are fine horsemen, and ride their horses as though born in the saddle, their long capes of black fur, wide and square at the shoulders, sweep far back across the horses' haunches, enveloping them in an air of grand magnificence.

But the Abkhazian of the peasant class, on the street, young or old, has no regard for the presence of others. You must step aside to let his horse pass; he will cross your path directly in front of you; he will jostle you rudely in passing along the street; he will crowd in front of you in line at the theater box or the bread stand. All this without any intention of offense; he is merely thinking of himself and his own affairs; you are expected to do the same. And before the driver of a motor car, you must be absolutely your own guardian. The whole street, the whole world belongs to him, and this new consciousness of power within his hand makes him dizzy with arrogance. He drives along at reckless speed, with continual blare of his horn, and will crowd you off the path—into the ditch, if needs be—with absolute unconsciousness of your existence.

The plaintive strains of the organ-grinder are tuning up beneath my
(Continued on last page)

**Mrs. Troyer's Letter
From Russia**

(Continued from first page)

window. Excuse me, please for a minute, while I take a look. He comes here every Rest Day, followed by an admiring train of small boys and girls. Apartment windows open one after another, and a bright-eyed little girl, with a soiled white kerchief tied about her head, gathers up the coins with great agility.

Last week I visited a most interesting institution, a Medical Research Institute. The beautifully landscaped grounds and the imposing buildings situated on the mountain side, with a wonderful outlook over the sea, formerly belonged to the estate of a wealthy engineer. Now, under maintenance of the Soviet Government, monkeys are being bred here for medical experimentation. They now have a herd of about two hundred. As I passed along the cages, and looked into those wise-old little faces so human and yet so unhuman; as I gazed into the depths of those brown eyes so subtly clever, and yet so utterly lacking in spiritual light; as I observed those capable hands, with their slender, delicate fingers, and even fingernails, so strangely like the human hand, and yet so unlike, I marveled, and returned home to ponder over the mysteries of this world of ours, in which we live and spend our allotted years of enjoyment and struggle, and of which we really know so little. There are only nine such institutions in existence, five in America, one of which is in Florida, and four in the rest of the world, one of which is here at Sukhum.

Now, I will say Happy New Year to you in Russian: "S-nawom z-daw-dom." In Russia, Christmas is not observed, but the coming of the new year is celebrated with hilarity. Melville and I were invited to a school children's party on New Year's Eve, and we enjoyed participating in their festivities. They presented some little plays very acceptably, one from Tolstoy and one from Pushkin. The Russian is naturally dramatic in ordinary conversation. There were also piano and vocal numbers, but what was most interesting to us was the dancing. The children were dressed in national costumes from different periods, and the dances were national folk dances. We thought of the Organic School dances, and wished that we could transcribe these for Fairhope. One attractive little girl in trim Abkhazian costume of dark wool, trousers gaiters at the knee, with cartridges, belt, dagger, and all other accessories gave a solo performance, a Circassian dance covering the whole floor in her like maneuvers. She danced up to her father several times inviting him dramatically to join her. But he refused with a smile. Here was surely a star performance. The Soviet Government is awake to the historic and art value of these national folk dances and songs, and they are being collected in all parts of the Union.

In Alabama, when we spoke of Russia, we thought of the whole Soviet Union. Here, when people speak of Russia, they refer only to old Russia. The USSR is a union of seven republics—a land of 150 nationalities. These include: Russia, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the Transcaucasus, Georgia, Abkhazia, Ajaristan and Armenia; in Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Turkistan and Tajikistan, and others with long foreign names.

In Sukhum, we see many different nationalities—all intensely interesting in face, dress and conduct. Besides those belonging to nations of the USSR, there are Greeks and Germans in considerable numbers. The Armenian type of beauty attracts me especially. A beautiful young Armenian girl comes for our laundry. But their beauty, I am told, fades early. The doctor to whom a friend took me for treatment when I was unable to stop my cough, is a citizen of Persia. His ex-wife, of Armenian parentage, is one of my pupils. Two of the beautiful children who look quite like the picture I am enclosing. We know of no English people here, and no Americans except ourselves. There are a few who speak English, after a fashion, and there is widespread interest in learning the English language.

In fact, this has become a land of eager to learn. Here, accomplishment, particularly in the fields of industry, is awarded special recognition. We are living in the midst of science workers—in apartments provided by the Subtropical Insti-

tute with which Melville is associated. This is an institute devoted to agricultural and horticultural research work covering many fields of investigation. They regard the citrus developments as highly important. The results of these experiments are spread throughout the whole subtropical district for the assistance of growers of commercial developments.

There is so much of interest here that the days are no long enough or rather, my strength is not sufficient—for me to see, to learn, and to do all that my program calls for. It has been a struggle for me to become adjusted to the climate, but I expect to conquer in the end. I am doing some teaching of English, and I wish I could fly back to America to gather up material that would assist me very much. I progress slowly with my study of Russian; it is a very difficult language. However, I am not discouraged, and hope that by the end of the year, I shall be able to talk a little. I can make myself understood when I so happen and can make necessary changes—and that is something.

How many times you and Henry slip into our thoughts, you cannot tell. Our little visits over the steeps at your home, and in the store, are delightful memories. Distance and seas may separate, but cannot alienate true friends. We cherish your friendship and hope that some day we may again talk face to face. Melville says, "I wish that the Kamperns lived next door."

With sincerest regard from us both,

Eiva D.
Sukhum, (Crxym),
Abkhazia,
USSR.

Box 74
Troyer, A. M.
(Tpoopy, A. M.)

Organic School Notes

(Continued from first page)

schools for help in organizing dancing classes as a regular part of the school program and we hope to be of much assistance to those so interested. Mr. Lawrence Nichols of Grand Rapids, Mich., an Alumnus of the school, has contributed a microphone for use on our sound truck and we have plans to equip Centage Hall with sound amplifiers for use as occasion demands.

Watch for the date of the approaching Spring Style Show, to be put on by the C. J. Gayler Co. of Mobile for the benefit of the Organic School under the auspices of the Parents Round Table. This is to be a very interesting pre-Easter affair, and you would regret missing it.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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