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NEWS LETTER

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Once again has come the message from Thessalonica: "All Americans safe and well." This time it came from Mr. John Johnson, the American Consul, who with the Vice Consul, Mr. Edmund Gullion and Mr. and Mrs. Charles House, make up the present American colony.

We believe all friends of the School will be interested to know, all that we ourselves know about what has been happening in Thessalonica and the School during these past months.

Although we do not know a great deal, the fact that Mr. and Mrs. House are there and that Mr. House has cabled for funds for the School convinces the Board of Trustees that there is important work for the School to do; and that Mr. and Mrs. House will do it if it is humanly possible to be done. We still have obligations to the staff and for the maintenance of the Agricultural and Industrial departments which have been extremely busy since the war began. Through letters from Mr. and Mrs. House which have reached us since we sent out the last News Letter, we have learned much about the events that led up to the evacuation of Thessalonica, and the reasons that led Mr. and Mrs. House to remain at the School.

Early in March after the German occupation of Bulgaria, Mr. House wrote: "The political implications for Greece are so overwhelming that all other problems are overshadowed for the time being." The effect was felt almost immediate, because a few days later, on March 10th, Mrs. House wrote of their trip back to the Red Cross headquarters in Athens. "We left the Farm Friday afternoon, loaded with blankets, butter, our own corned beef, etc., etc., and with five in the car. We spent that night at Kozani. We had expected to sleep in the car, for such hordes of people are leaving Thessalonica, that hotels on the way south are crowded. We kept passing cars and wagons loaded with household goods and families all the way, and trains have been so crowded that one must wait a week or ten days for a ticket."

Mr. House writes from Athens of the School under date of March 16th: "Life under war conditions is as active as usual, and the staff that remains has re-distributed the tasks since the younger men have left. Five members of the staff decided to take their vacations at this time, between seed time and harvest, in order to take their families south, expecting them to return to the School. The bombardments in the city have brought to the School many relatives of the staff, as well as the consular staff and families; so that the farm community numbers 350 persons and includes 75 children whose laughter and play around the place give life and a happy atmosphere to a community which has had to spend a good many hours in air raid shelters."

"It has been decided that the School buildings offer the best facilities as a central depot for the distribution of relief in that region. Princeton Hall, which is fireproof, is ideal for the supplies which are coming on a Mercy Ship from the United States. On the School playground we have built a red cross of brick set in white limestone in a circle 110 feet in diameter."

"The Mercy Ship is soon due," writes Mrs. House from Athens, "and we are very excited about it. Mr. House will probably have to go right back to Thessalonica to see about the quick distribution. I will go, too, as it seems best not to be separated at this time. I go with him wherever I am allowed. I've visited a good many of the hospitals. The stories of Spartan heroism which used to thrill me as a child are real today. I talked with a big fair youth from Sparta the other day at Loutrachi, across from Corinth. His nurse told me he had been so wounded that he lay in the snow high on a mountain in Albania for four days, without food, before some one found him, with the result that both feet had to be amputated. He sat up in bed with excitement over the hope I gave him that he could walk again. I told him of Mr. House's work on artificial limbs and he said: 'Thank America for me.' He is one of so many; and I have not seen a single man who is sorry for himself."

"On our way back from the hospital that day, while waiting at the station, there was an air raid. We all had to run to a ditch and into a low tunnel dug into the side of a hill. A mother with a baby and three little boys was trying to herd them into the tunnel when she saw me. She pulled one of the boys back, trying to get me to go in first, saying: 'The lady is a stranger and mustn't get hurt in our country.'"

"Charles told me of visiting with another of these brave soldiers in one of the hospitals. They were joking and laughing together in high spirits when Charlie asked him about his home and work. He pushed out his two stumps and said: 'Can you do anything about these? I have 300 sheep at home. Can I care for them again? People say I'd better sell them.' Charlie told him he would walk again and not to sell his sheep.... I visited some 60 young soldiers, boys all of them, and all had lost both feet. A pretty young girl was dressing the poor stumps as I went in. I could hardly stand it but felt that when they had been through so much the least I could do was to visit with them, and I did, telling them what Charles was doing, serving on a committee to get artificial legs and feet for them; but I had to tell them to be patient, and wait many months. Many of them said: 'Oh, that doesn't matter, if we can only walk again.' They were all so young; just boys in their 20's; nearly all of them farm boys big and husky and used to working in the fields. When I returned I told Charlie that they must have wheel-chairs and deck-chairs so that they could be wheeled into the sunshine and Charlie immediately telephoned the order and hoped to have some made soon."

"Mr. Lewis Jones, attached to the American Legation has made a set of scooters which makes it possible for the wounded to move about in the hospital wards; and the first time one of the boys succeeded in rolling down the aisle the others cheered him as if he had made a home run. He is also making some improvements to the wheel-chairs. We are planning to take back with us sample back-rests, bandage-rollers, wheel-chairs (unassembled); all these things we are making for the hospitals in our School shops."

Mr. and Mrs. House did not reach Thessalonica until March 24th, but the next day found Mrs. House at her typewriter. "Home, sweet Home, and it surely is sweet to be home and celebrate Independence Day with the people on the farm. This morning Mr. and Mrs. Gardner and the two children walked with me to see the little chicks and baby pigs. Johnny held one of the pigs and both children held the chicks so carefully. Lucy Ann is growing up so fast, runs about most independently, loves everybody and everybody loves her. Johnny is very much the older brother.."

During the next few days the plans for the evacuation of Thessalonica progressed. On April 8th, through the State Department in Washington, the N.Y. office was notified that Mr. and Mrs. George Gardner had left Thessalonica on the 7th in a car, and that after a 24 hour non-stop journey, arrived in Athens safe and well. We next had word that they had left Athens and arrived in Alexandria, where they will remain until they can arrange transportation to the United States.

It is from Mr. George Weller of the Chicago Daily News and New York Post that we get the following eye-witness account of the evacuation of Thessalonica: "Thessalonica was abandoned according to an orderly plan whereby the city was recognized as a liability in a long campaign...Nothing can rub from my mind the growingly haunted look that appeared on the faces of the Thessalonikians walking the streets on Tuesday (April 8th) or the scene at the station after the last train had departed....There was virtually no demonstration, but if the sound of heart-breaking could be heard, the reverberations of those obliged to stay behind...would have made thunder outdoing the heaviest artillery." Before leaving he had a final conversation with Charles House. When asked when he was leaving with his wife, Mr. House replied: "I guess we'll stay; we've lots of people on our hands."

A cable received by the Greek War Relief committee in N.Y. explains this decision which we quote with their permission: "After German occupation, House preferred to stay in Thessalonica and continue highly humanitarian effort among unevacuated part of population. House renders invaluable help to accutely suffering people." ... Three cables have arrived from Thessalonica since the Germans entered the city. The first message dated April 9th was sent to the American Red Cross by courtesy of the German Military commander at Thessalonica via the American Embassy at Berlin and the State Department in Washington. It stated that Mr. and Mrs. House were well but that funds were needed to help the 200,000 desperately needy families. The other two cables, April 15th and May 12th, merely stated that Mr. and Mrs. House were safe and well.

We can not close this letter without expressing our deep appreciation to officials of the State Department and of the American Red Cross in Washington who have been most kind in keeping us informed of any news that concerns Mr. and Mrs. House and the School.

It is needless to say that the Trustees are counting on the prayers and the help of all friends of the American Farm School. We close with the Resolution adopted at their last meeting on May 8th: It is the sincere conviction of the Board of Trustees that the American Farm School will be a continuing influence for good in Macedonia and the Balkans in the same fine spirit of those who founded and have carried on the School up to the present time.