

Transcaucasia and Ararat

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TRANSCAUCASIA

AND

ARARAT

BEING NOTES OF A VACATION TOUR IN THE
AUTUMN OF 1876

BY

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'THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE'; 'THE AMERICAN COMMONWEALTH,' ETC.

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CHAPTER III TRANSCAUCASIA

In this chapter I shall attempt to give a sort of general sketch of the Russian territories lying to the south of the Caucasus, the richest, and, for the present at least, geographically the most important of all the Asiatic dominions of the Czar. It is, like the rest of this book, a record of first impressions only, but of impressions formed, as I venture to believe, without any pre-existing bias, and to a considerable extent tested by comparison with the conclusions which other travellers have reached. And even for first impressions there is this much to be said, that the risk of errors of observation and of hasty generalisation has some compensation in the freshness with which things present themselves to a new-comer. Occasionally he is struck by aspects of society or politics which are really true and important, but which one who has lived long in a country finds so familiar that they have ceased to stimulate his curiosity, and would perhaps be omitted from his descriptions. This may supply some justification for the apparent presumption of a traveller who admits that he had to see, and now has to write, more hastily than he could have wished. What I have got to say of particular parts of the country, such as Tiflis, the capital, and Armenia, is reserved for later chapters.

Transcaucasia is a convenient general name for the countries lying between the Black Sea, the Caspian, and the Caucasus, which make up the dominions of the Czar in Western Asia. It is not, however, an official Russian name, for although for some purposes they distinguish Ciscaucasia and Transcaucasia, the administrative district of lieutenancy of the empire which they call the Caucasus (Kavkaz) includes not only the regions south of the mountains, but also several governments lying to the north, in what the geographers call Europe. Nor does it denote any similarity or common character in these countries, the chief of which are Georgia, which lies along the upper course of the Kur, south of the Caucasus; Armenia, farther south, on the Araxes, between Georgia, Persia, and Turkey; Imeritia, west of Georgia; and Mingrelia, west of Imeritia, along the eastern coast of the Black Sea. However, it is a convenient name, and before speaking of each of these countries by itself, something may be said of the general physical features of Transcaucasia as a whole. It may be broadly described as consisting of two mountain regions and two plains. First, all along the north, there are the slopes of the Caucasus, which on this side (at least in its western half, for towards the east the main chain sinks quite abruptly into the levels of Kakhitia) sends off several lateral ranges descending far from the axis, and at last subsiding into a fertile and well-peopled hilly country. Secondly, on the south, over against the Caucasus, there is another mountain land, less elevated, but wider in extent, consisting of the chain which under various local names (some geographers have called it the Anti-Caucasus) runs from Lazistan at the south-east angle of the Black Sea away to the east and south-east till it meets the ranges of Persia. Towards the south, this chain ramifies all over Armenia, and here attains its greatest height in the volcanic summits of Ala Goz, 13,460 feet above the

sea, while northward its spurs form a hilly country stretching to Tiflis. These two mountain masses are connected by a ridge which, branching off from the Caucasus between Elbruz and Kazbek, the two best known of all the summits of that chain, divides the waters of the Kur from those of the Rion (Phasis), and is crossed by the great road and railway from Tiflis to the Black Sea near the town of Suram. Although of no great height— it is only about 3600 feet at Suram—this ridge has a most important influence (to be referred to presently) both on the climate and on the ethnology of the country. It is that which Strabo speaks of as inhabited by the Moschici¹, and is sometimes, therefore, called by modern geographers the Meschic ridge.

The two plains I have spoken of are of very unequal size. The eastern extends all along the Caspian, from the southern foot of the Caucasus to the Persian frontier, and runs up the valley of the Kur, gradually rising, to within a few miles of Tiflis. It is open, bare, and dry; is, in fact, what the Russians call steppe country, or the Americans prairie, through nearly its whole extent, and though the soil is fertile, much of it, especially towards the Caspian, is but thinly peopled or cultivated. The western plain, on the other hand, lying along the lower course of the Rion, between the Caucasus, the Anti-Caucasus, and the Black Sea, is moist and densely wooded, parts of it little better than a forest swamp, but the whole, where dry enough for tillage, extremely rich. It has all the appearance of having been, at no distant period, a bay of the Euxine, which may gradually have got filled up by the alluvium brought down by the Rion and other Caucasian streams. When this bay existed, and when the Caspian, which we know to have greatly shrunk, even in comparatively recent times, extended far up the valley of the Kur, and was joined to the Euxine at some point north of the Caucasus, the Caucasus itself formed an immense mountain peninsula, united to the highlands of Western Asia by an isthmus consisting of the Suram ridge already referred to and the elevated country east of it. And as at this time the Caspian was also, no doubt, connected with the Sea of Aral (which is only some 160 feet above the present level of the Caspian, and about 80 above the ocean), one may say that the Mediterranean then extended through this chain of inland seas, far into Central Asia, perhaps to the sites of Khiva, Tashkend, and Bokhara.

The climates of these two plains are strangely contrasted, and the ridge of Suram marks the boundary between them. On the Black Sea coast the winters are mild (mean winter temperature about 44 ° F., mean annual temperature 58°), snow falls, perhaps, but hardly lies, all sorts of southern plants thrive in the open air, and the rainfall is so abundant that vegetation is everywhere, even up in the mountains, marvellously profuse. At Poti, the seaport at the mouth of the Rion which every traveller from the West is condemned to pass through, the most fever- smitten den in all Asia, one feels in a perpetual vapour bath, and soon becomes too enervated to take the most obvious precautions against the prevailing malady. Higher up, in the deep valleys of the Ingur

¹ Interpreters, from the time of Josephus downwards (who places them more towards Cappadocia), have sought to identify these Moschici or Meschi (as Procopius calls them, Goth. iv. 3) with the Mesech of the Bible (Gen. x. 2; Ps. cxx. 5).

and Kodor, rivers which descend from the great chain, the forests are positively tropical (though the vegetation itself is European) in the splendour of the trees and the rank luxuriance of the underwood. If there were a few roads and any enterprise, this country might drive a magnificent trade in wood and all sorts of natural productions.

This is the general character of the Black Sea coast. But when you cross the Meschic watershed at Suram, and enter the basin of the Kur, drawing towards the Caspian, everything changes. The streams are few, the grass is withered on the hillside, by degrees even the beechwoods begin to disappear; and as one gets farther and farther to the east, beyond Tiflis, there is in autumn hardly a trace of vegetation either on plain or hills, except along the courses of the shrunken rivers and on the northern slopes of the mountains that divide the basins of the Kur and Aras. In these regions the winter is very severe, and the summer heats are tremendous. At Lenkoran, on the Caspian, in latitude 38° N., the sea is often blocked with ice for two miles from the shore, and the average winter temperature is the same as that of Maestricht, in latitude 51°, or Reykjavik (in Iceland), in latitude 64°. The rainfall, which near Poti reaches 63 inches in the year, is at Baku only 137, and in some parts of the Aras valley only 5 inches. The explanation, of course, is that, while the moist westerly winds are arrested by the ridge at Suram, the eastern steppe lies open to the parching and bitter blasts which descend from Siberia and the frozen plains of Turkestan, while the scorching summers are not greatly moderated by the influence of a neighbouring sea.

In Armenia the same causes operate, with the addition that, as a good deal of the country stands at a great height above the sea-level, the winters are in those parts long and terrible. At Alexandropol, for instance, the great Russian fortress built over against Kars to watch it, and in which a large part of the Russian frontier army is always stationed, snow lies till the middle of April, spring lasts only about a fortnight, and during summer the country is parched like any desert².

A result of this remarkable dryness of the climate, away from the Black Sea and its influences, is that the landscapes of Eastern Transcaucasia are bare, brown, and generally dreary. If there was ever wood on the lower grounds, it has been long since cut away, and probably could hardly be made to grow if now replanted. There is a certain impressiveness in the wide views of bare brown open plains and stem red mountains which are so often before one in these countries, and, I fancy, in Persia also; the effects both of light and shade, and of colour, are broad, deep, solemn. These are the merits of Eastern landscapes generally, which an eye accustomed to the minuter prettiness of such a country as our own perhaps underrates. Admitting them, however, I must still remark that there is not much in Transcaucasia to attract the lover of natural beauty, except in two regions, the spurs of the Caucasus and the part of Armenia which lies round and commands a prospect of Mount Ararat. These are certainly considerable exceptions, for the scenery of each is quite unlike anything to be found in Europe. The luxuriant vegetation of the deep western valleys of the chain and the noble views of its

² The mean winter temperature of Alexandropol is 16° F.; its annual rainfall, 14.68 inches.

tremendous snowy summits, streaming with glaciers, present pictures surpassing even those of the Italian valleys of the Alps—pictures that one must go to the Himalaya to find a parallel for. Ararat, again, an isolated volcanic cone rising 17,000 feet above the sea and 14,400 feet above the plain at its own base, is a phenomenon the like of which hardly exists in the world.

Whether beautiful or the reverse, however, the country is nearly everywhere rich, and might do wonders if it were filled by a larger, more energetic, and better-educated population. There are little over three millions of people in it now;³ it could easily support twenty. The steppe soil is generally extremely fertile, needing nothing but irrigation to produce heavy crops of grain. In some parts, especially along the Araxes, cotton is raised. The warm valleys of Mingrelia and Imeritia produce maize, an important article of export, rice, and other southern cereals; corn grows up to a height of 5000 or 7000 feet, and the tea shrub thrives on the hills. The olive is not common, and, though the vine will grow almost everywhere, the wine is generally inferior. Some of that which is made in Armenia is tolerable, but by far the best is that of Kakhitia, a delightfully pretty region lying immediately under the great wall of the Eastern Caucasus, north-east of Tiflis. Its wine is sound and wholesome, albeit a little acid. The natives are very proud of it, and incessantly vaunt its merits as a specific against fever and otherwise; they certainly all follow the prescription, and the Georgians in particular, a race of jovial toppers, are apt to carry their appreciation a little too far. If it would bear travelling, it would be a valuable article of export; and possibly, when better methods of making it than the present very primitive ones are introduced, and when it is put in casks instead of buffalo hides smeared with naphtha, it may rival the wines of the Don and the Crimea in the markets of Southern Russia. Of the wealth of the western forests in box, walnut, and woods of all sorts, suited for furniture as well as shipbuilding, it is needless to speak; of the minerals, it is rather difficult, for although every one believes that there is abundance in the mountains, and there is constant talk of getting up companies to work them, very little has been done to determine their precise amount or quality. Coal certainly exists in the west, among the mountains of Imeritia, north-east of Kutais, but the abundance of wood has made people remiss in availing themselves of it. Iron and copper have been discovered in many places; the best copper mines hitherto opened lie in the northern declivity of the Karabagh Mountains, to the south-west of Elizavetpol, and are worked by Messrs. Siemens Brothers⁴.

Salt is abundant in Armenia, especially near Kulpi, on the Upper Aras; and the Mingrelians, who really have silver mines, appeal to the instance of the Golden Fleece as proof that the precious metals exist among them. There is no doubt that grains of gold are found in the detritus brought down by the Phasis and other streams, but

³ [The population is now (1896) nearly five millions, but a part of this increase is due to the addition of territory taken from Turkey in the war of 1877. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

⁴ [Manganese mines have been for some years past (1896) extensively worked on the west side of the Suram range, and the mineral has become an important export. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

whether it is true, as geographers and travellers have gone on repeating ever since Strabo set the story going, that the natives place fleeces in the current to catch the passing particles, I have not been able to ascertain. Sulphur has been got in Daghestan, and was used by ShamyI to make gunpowder when he could get none from Persia. Perhaps the most remarkable mineral product is naphtha or petroleum, which comes to the surface in many places, but most profusely near Baku, on the coast of the Caspian, in strong springs, some of which emit gas that is always burning, while others, lying close to or even below the sea, will sometimes discharge the spirit or gas over the water, so that, when a light is applied, and the weather is calm, the sea appears to take fire, and blue flames flicker for miles over the surface.⁵ Now and then, when a deep shaft has been sunk, the oil will shoot up into the air hundreds of feet high, like a geyser, and go on thus discharging for months. The place was greatly revered of old by the fire-worshippers, and after they were extirpated from Persia by the Mohammedans, who hate them bitterly, some few occasionally slunk here on pilgrimage. Now, under the more tolerant sway of the Czar, a solitary priest of fire is maintained by the Parsee community of Bombay, who inhabits a small temple built over one of the springs, and, like a vestal, tends the sacred flame by day and night.

If it is hard to give a general idea of a country so various in its physical aspects, it is even more so to describe its strangely mixed population. From the beginning of history, all sorts of tribes and races have lived in this isthmus between the Euxine and the Caspian, and though some of them may have now disappeared or been absorbed by others, new elements have pressed in from the north and east. Strabo, writing under Augustus, mentions four peoples as dwelling south of the Caucasus: the Colchians, along the Black Sea; the Iberians, farther to the east, beyond the cross ridge of Suram (which he calls an aytccov (elbow) of the Caucasus); the Albanians, still farther eastward, in the plains along the Caspian Sea; and the Armenians, to the south of all these, in the country we still call Armenia. To the north of the three former, the wooded valleys of the Caucasus were occupied by many wild tribes, more akin, says he, to the Sarmatians, but speaking many different languages; one of the wildest are the Soanes, the name still borne by a rude and primitive race who inhabit the grandest part of the whole Caucasus, immediately to the south of Elbruz and Koshtantau, and of whom I have spoken in the preceding chapter. While these Soanes have been protected by their inaccessibility in the pathless recesses of the mountains, all trace of the names of Colchians, Iberians, and Albanians⁶ has long since passed away, and though Mingrelians now live where Jason found the Colchians, there is nothing to show

⁵ [Important oil springs have been discovered and are now (1896) being largely worked on the north side of the Caucasus also, at Grosny, 100 miles east of Vladikavkaz, and a little north of Novorossisk, near the Black Sea coast. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

⁶ Those who build ethnological theories on similarities of name may be asked to try to connect these Albanians with the Albanians of Epirus and the Scottish Alban, or these Iberians with the Iberians of Spain.

that any of the blood of Aetes and Medea flows in their degenerate veins, though the names of the Greek hero and his formidable bride are used to-day as Christian names in the country. Russian ethnologists talk of a Karthalinian stock, to which Mingrelians, Imeritians, and Georgians, as well as some of the mountain tribes, are declared to belong. But, without discussing problems of ethnology for whose solution sufficient materials have not yet been collected, I will shortly describe the chief races that now occupy the country.

Beginning from the west, we find the Mingrelians along the Black Sea coast, from the Turkish border to Sukhum Kaleh. They are the ne'er-do-wells of the Caucasian family. All their neighbours, however backward a Western may think them, have a bad word and a kick for the still more backward Mingrelian. To believe them, he is lazy, sensual, treacherous, and stupid, a liar and a thief. The strain in which the Russians and Armenians talk of them reminded me of the description one gets from the Transylvanian Saxons and Magyars of the Wallachs or Roumans who live among them. You ask what kind of people the Wallachs are. "A dirty people," they answer, "a treacherous people, a lazy people, a superstitious people, a cruel people, a gluttonous people. Otherwise not such a bad kind of people." (*Sonst ist es keitt schlechtes Volk.*) Lazy the Mingrelian certainly is, but in other respects I doubt if he is worse than his neighbours; and he lives in so damp and warm a climate that violent exercise must be disagreeable. He is a well-made, good-looking fellow, but with a dull and perhaps rather sensual expression. And he is certainly backward in agriculture and trade, making very little of a singularly rich country. South of Mingrelia lies Guria, on the slopes and ridges of the Anti-Caucasus, a land where the people are more vigorous and upright, and where, as they have been less affected by conquest and immigration, the picturesque old costumes have best maintained themselves. West of the Mingrelians, in the hilly regions of the Upper Rion and its tributaries, live the Imeritians, a race speaking the Georgian language, who may generally be distinguished by their bushy hair. My personal knowledge of them is confined to three waiters at three several inns, rather a narrow basis for induction, but quite as wide as many travellers have had for some very sweeping conclusions. They have a better name than the Mingrelians, both for industry and honesty, and these three waiters were pleasant, civil fellows, though not particularly bright.

Still farther east, and occupying the centre of Transcaucasia, are the Georgians, called by the Russians Grusinians or Grusians, who may be considered the principal and, till the arrival of the Muscovite, the dominant race of the country. They call themselves Karthli, deducing their origin from a patriarch Karthlos (who was brother of Haik, the patriarch of the Armenian nation, and of Legis, the ancestor of the Lesghians), a grandson, or, as others hold, great-grandson of Gomer, son of Japhet. According to their own legends, they worshipped the sun and the moon and the five planets, and swore by the grave of Karthlos until converted to Christianity by St. Nina, in the fourth century of our era. For several centuries their kingdom extended almost to the Black

Sea in one direction and the Caspian in another, and maintained itself with some credit against the hostility of Turks and Persians, though often wasted by Persian armies, and for long periods obliged to admit the suzerainty of the Shah. Its heroic age was the time of Queen Tamara, who flourished in the twelfth century, and is still honoured by pictures all over the country, in which she appears as a beautiful Amazon, not unlike the fancy portraits of Joan of Arc. To her is ascribed the foundation of every ancient church or monastery, just as all the strongholds are said to have been built by the robber Kir Oghlu,⁷ and as in Scotland there is hardly an old mansion but shows Wallace's sword and Queen Mary's apartment. Somewhat later the kingdom became divided into three, Kakhitia, Karthli, or Georgia proper, on the Upper Kur, and Imeritia; and in the period of weakness that followed it began to look for help to Russia. As early as 1492, a king of Kakhitia invoked the Czar Ivan III., and in 1638 the king of Imeritia swore fealty to Alexis Mihailovitch. The famous treaty of Kainardji in 1774 (about which we have had so many lively discussions) placed Georgia, Imeritia, and Mingrelia under the protection of Russia. However, *the coup de grâce* was given by the invasion of the Persians, under Aga Mohammed Khan, in 1795, which reduced Georgia to such wretchedness that the reigning king George made over his dominions to Alexander I. in 1799, and the country was finally occupied by Russian troops in 1802.⁸ One sees traces of a sort of feudal period in the numerous castles; most of them mere square towers, such as we see on the coast of Scotland and the north of Ireland, which lie scattered all over Georgia and Imeritia; and the organisation of society was till quite lately feudal, the peasantry villeins under the native kings, and reduced under the Russians to serfdom, while the upper class consisted of landowning nobles and their immediate dependants. It is a joke among the Russians that every Georgian is a noble; and as the only title of nobility is Prince, the effect to an English ear of hearing all sorts of obscure people, country postmasters, droshky drivers, sometimes even servants, described as being Prince So-and-so, is at first grotesque. The number of noble families is, however, really not very large. I have heard it put as low as thirty, but as the title goes to all the children, each of the families has a vast number of titled members. This at least may be said for the numerous nobility, that, although it has been charged with vanity and frivolity, it does not despise all honest occupations. And some of the Georgian noble houses have pedigrees, apparently authentic pedigrees, older than any to be found in Europe.

Every one has heard of the Georgian beauties, who in the estimation of Turkish importers rivalled or surpassed those of Circassia itself. Among them a great many

⁷ Stories of Kir (or Kara = Black) Oghlu are told all about the country. One, localised in Armenia, represents him as meeting a party of travellers, and among them one with pistols (then lately invented) stuck in his belt. He asks what those things are, and, when their use is explained to him, exclaims, "Farewell, Kir Oghlu, your occupation is gone," rides off into the mountains, and is never more seen.

⁸ Russia, however, did not acquire Imeritia till 1810, the Mingrelian coast till 1829 (by the Treaty of Adrianople), the Caspian coast south of the mouth of the Kur till 1813, and the valley of the Middle Araxes till 1828. She had already obtained from Persia, between 1797 and 1802, Daghestan and Shirvan as far as the Kur mouth.

handsome and even some beautiful faces may certainly be seen, regular and finely chiselled features, a clear complexion, large and liquid eyes, an erect carriage, in which there is a good deal of dignity as well as of voluptuousness. To a taste, however, formed upon Western models, mere beauty of features and figure, without expression, is not very interesting; and these beautiful faces frequently want expression. Nor have they always that vivacity which, in the parallel case of the women of Andalusia, partly redeems the deficiency of intelligence. Admirable as pieces of Nature's handiwork, they are not equally charming. A Turk may think them perfection, but it may be doubted whether any one who had seen the ladies of Cork or Baltimore would take much pleasure in their society. However, this is a point on which people will disagree to the end of time; and those who hold that it is enough to look at a beauty without feeling inclined to talk to her need not go beyond Georgia to find all they can wish. It must be remembered, however, that this loveliness is rather fleeting. Towards middle life the complexion is apt to become sallow, and the nose and chin rather too prominent, while the vacuity of look remains. One is told that they are, as indeed the whole nation is, almost uneducated, with nothing but petty personal interests to fill their thoughts or animate their lives.⁹

The men are sufficiently good-looking and pleasing in manner, with, perhaps, a shade of effeminacy in their countenances, at least in those of the lowland. They do not strike one as a strong race, either physically or otherwise, though they have produced some remarkable men, and having obtained civilisation and Christianity in the fourth century of our era, have ever since maintained their religion and national existence with great tenacity against both Turks and Persians. So early as the sixth century, Procopius compliments the Iberians (who are doubtless the ancestors of our Georgians) on their resolute adherence to Christian rites in spite of the attacks of the Persian fire-worshippers,¹⁰ who, it may be remarked in passing, seem to have been the first to set the example of religious persecution. The Muslims say that the Christianity of the Georgians is owing to their fondness for wine and for pork, both which good things, as everybody knows, the Prophet has forbidden to true believers. They belong to the Orthodox Eastern Church, and are now in full communion with the Church of Russia, of which indeed they may be said to have become a branch, though they have strong grounds for demanding to be recognised as autocephalous, and their liturgy differs a little in some points from the Russian. During the earlier middle ages I suspect that they were more influenced by Armenia than by Constantinople, though they had separated from the Armenian Church in the end of the sixth century, when the latter finally anathematised the Council of Chalcedon. The Georgian Church claims the distinction of

⁹ [Since the above was written a new spirit has worked upon Georgian society, and I am told that the women are now better educated and far more interested in intellectual pursuits and in public affairs than they were in 1876. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

¹⁰ Kobad, the reigning king of Persia, whose supremacy the Iberians then owned, had tried to force them over to his faith, and began by ordering them to desist from burying their dead, and to adopt the Persian practice of exposing the dead body to the birds and beasts. They refused, and sought help from the Romans (Procop. Pers. 1. 12).

never having, at any time, lapsed into any heresy. Their ecclesiastical alphabet—for they have two—resembles the Armenian. Of their number it is difficult to form an estimate; it can hardly exceed 500,000 souls, and may be considerably less.¹¹

Scattered through Upper Georgia, and to be found among the peasantry as well as in the towns, there is a considerable Armenian population, who probably settled here when their national kingdom was destroyed by the Seljukian conquerors, Alp Arslan and Malek Shah, in the eleventh century. Farther south, in Armenia proper, they constitute the bulk of the population in the country districts, Kurds being mixed with them in the mountains, Tatars in the plains, and Persians in the towns. As I shall have to recur to them in a later chapter, it is enough to remark here that they are the most vigorous and intelligent of the Transcaucasian races, with a gift for trade which has enabled them to get most of the larger business of the country into their hands. Their total number in these countries is estimated at 550,000.¹² Between them and the Georgians there is little cordiality, especially as their wealthy men are apt to be creditors, and the Georgians apt to be debtors.

Going down the Kur from Tiflis towards the Caspian, one finds the Georgians give place to a people whom the Russians call Tatars, and who are unquestionably a branch of the great Turkic family. When or how they settled here, no one can precisely tell, but it seems likely the earliest immigration was from the north, along the Caspian coast. There is no doubt that the Emperor Heraclius, in his long war with Persia in the middle of the seventh century, called in to his aid the Khazars, a Scythian tribe, from the Caspian steppe north of Derbend. Probably these Khazars were the first Turks who settled on this side the mountains; but many others must have come in afterwards from the south-east at the time of the great Seljukian conquests in the eleventh century. The Albanians of Strabo's time seem to have disappeared as a nation. Veritable Turks these fellows certainly are, quite unlike the mongrel race who go by the name of the Turks in Europe, and much more resembling, in face, figure, and character, the pure undiluted Turkman of Khiva and the steppes of the Jaxartes. Being in some districts a settled and industrious race, they are, however, less wild-looking than the Turkmans, and remind one more of the grave and respectable Tatar of Kazan or the Crimea. Their villages, often mere burrows in the dry soil, are scattered all over the steppe eastward to the Caspian, and southward as far as the Persian frontier. Many are agricultural, many more live by their sheep and cattle, which in summer are driven up towards the Armenian mountains and in winter return to the steppe; and some of them, settled in the larger towns, practise various handicrafts, and among others weave rich carpets and other woollen fabrics which pass in the markets of Europe under the name of Persian.¹³

¹¹ The total number of the Grusinian race, including Imeritians and Mingrelians, is estimated by a recent Russian statistician of authority at 850,000. [A more recent estimate (Caucasian Calendar of 1896), based on the census of 1886, gives the total number of persons of Georgian stock in the governments of Tiflis and Kutais at 1,247,963. —Note to Fourth Edition.]

¹² [It is now (1896) much larger, probably nearly 800,000. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

¹³ [Some of the wealthiest among the well-owners and refiners of mineral oil at Baku are Tatars. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

The Tatars are also the general carriers of the country. On the few roads, or oftener upon the open steppe, one sees their endless trains of carts, and more rarely their strings of camels, fetching goods from Shamakha, or Baku, or Tavriz, to Tiflis, thence to be despatched over the Dariel into Southern Russia, or by railway to Poti and Western Europe. The last of their occupations, the one in which they most excel, and which they have almost to themselves, is brigandage. To what extent it prevails, I cannot attempt to say, for, as every traveller knows, there is no subject, not even court scandal, on which one hears such an immense number of stories, some of them obviously exaggerated, many of them honestly related, most of them absolutely impossible to test if we had believed a quarter part of what the quidnuncs of Tiflis told us, we should have thought the country seriously disturbed, and travelling, especially by night, full of peril. If we had gone by our own experience, we should have pronounced the steppes of the Kur a great deal safer than Blackheath Common. Stories were always being brought into the city, and even appearing in the papers, of robberies, sometimes of murders; committed on the roads to Elizavetpol and Erivan; and along the latter road, we found the folk at the post stations with imaginations ready to see a Tatar behind every bush. Even the Russian officials at Tiflis, who of course desired to make little of anything that reflects on the vigilance of the Government, advised us to be careful where we halted, and how we displayed any valuables. I cannot help believing, therefore, that robberies do sometimes occur, and no doubt it is the Tatars, or at least bands led by a Tatar chief, who perpetrate them. But the substantial danger is not really more than sufficient to give a little piquancy to travelling, and make you fondle your pistols with the air of a man who feels himself prepared for an emergency. In a dull country, far removed from the interests and movements of the Western world, the pleasure of life is sensibly increased when people have got the exploits of robbers to talk about. It is a subject level with the meanest imagination; the idle Georgian noble and the ignorant peasant enjoy it as heartily as Walter Scott himself.

Some of the tales related about these robbers remind one of the legends of Robin Hood and other high-minded outlaws, who relieved the rich in order to relieve the poor. It is told, for instance, of Dali Agha, whom one heard talked of as the most famous of these brigand chiefs, that, being in love with the daughter of a man of substance, her father refused to give her to him except for a large sum of money. Dali was poor, but brave and sanguine; he demanded two years' time to collect it, and when the father promised to wait for so long, he took to the road to collect the sum by robbery; and though the faithless father had married the girl to another suitor before the appointed time, he liked the profession so well that he has not quitted it.¹⁴ He is at the head of a large band, and directs them to use all possible courtesy towards their victims, who are never killed except in case of necessity. Out of his plunder he gives freely to the poor,

¹⁴ A similar tale was told of the robber Arsen many years ago; so I daresay it is a stock incident, applied to every famous robber in turn, and may (who knows?) be a form of the Sun and Dawn myth.

and is so much beloved that no one will betray him; once, while Cossacks were scouring the country after him, he was living quietly in Erivan under the governor's nose. A physician in Government employment was travelling towards Elizavetpol to inspect the hospitals of his district, when he saw two suspicious persons on horseback a little way off, and drove faster on. As he turned the corner of a hill, three more appeared, and then a band, whose leader rode forward and wished him good evening. "Good evening," replied the doctor, who recognised the bandit. "I perceive you are in want of money; well, I haven't got much, only some hundred roubles; here they are in my trunk." "I see you are a good man," says Dali; "on what business are you travelling?" The doctor explains that he is going to visit a hospital, and needs some little money to reach it, so begs Dali to let him have a couple of roubles, which will pay for the post-horses thither. "You shall have fifty," Dali answered, and, taking them from his followers, who had opened the trunk, "here they are for you. And on your way back, stop at this place; my men will meet you and bring you to me; you shall be my guest for the night."

Another time, some of the band seized a poor priest who was travelling home with twenty-five roubles, which he had scraped together as a dowry for his daughter. Fearing for his life, he gives them the money, and is led to Dali, whom he finds in a thick wood, seated on a carpet-spread divan. Dali, seeing him to be a priest, receives him with respect—there is a good feeling between Mohammedans and Christians in some parts of these countries—makes him sit down, offers him coffee, sweetmeats, and a pipe, and hears the story of the dowry for the daughter's marriage. He apologises for the conduct of his men, and, pointing to the bales of precious stuffs that lie around, bids the captive take out of them the worth of twenty-five roubles. The priest does so, and, finding that the robbers are not watching him, he pockets a good deal more, thinking, I suppose, that he was spoiling the Egyptians, and makes off with his booty. However, he is pursued and caught by some of the band, who had not understood that he was to be favourably treated. Brought back before Dali, he is in terror lest they should discover how much he has taken, and flings himself down to beg for his life. Dali interrupts him, repeats that he is sorry anything was taken from so poor a man. "It was an unfortunate mistake, but mistakes will sometimes occur, and you must pardon it. Here, however, are twenty-five roubles; it is my gift to your daughter for her marriage portion; give them to her from Dali Agha and go in peace."

Whatever truth there is in such stories as these, they show the way in which the country people regard the robbers, and explain why brigandage still holds its ground against the efforts of the Government.¹⁵ Some people give another reason, and say that the inferior officials do not care to put it down, but take a share of the spoils, and sometimes, when they have caught a notable robber, release him for a good round ransom which his friends will always pay. This I believe to be a calumny, though of course such a thing may have occurred once and again; the chief difficulty in the way of

¹⁵ [I am informed that brigandage exists to-day (1896); and that robber bands are sometimes bold enough to attack the factories of European settlers, when these lie in solitary places. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

putting down brigandage is the vicinity of the Persian and Turkish dominions, into which marauders can easily escape, and whence the bands are constantly recruited by all sorts of adventurous spirits, who have lived under a government so bad that lawlessness seems justified. Take them all in all, these brigands, if they are not, as one of my informants said, "fine fellows who mean no harm," are evidently much better fellows than the members of their profession in Sicily or Greece, and deserve to be ranked with Dick Turpin or Claude Duval. Very different are the Turkman robbers who infest the road from the Caspian to Teheran, or those still fiercer tribes, described by Vámbéry, in the deserts of Khorassan and Bokhara, who carry off into cruel slavery all whom they do not kill on the spot.¹⁶

Besides these four nations, and the Armenians who live scattered among them, there are plenty of Persians in Transcaucasia, especially towards the south-west angle of the Caspian, and on the Aras, beyond Erivan, a region which Russia acquired from Persia only in 1828. They are singularly unlike the Tatars, whose enemies they have been ever since the mythic times of Sohrab and Rostum, and have an even deeper cause of hatred than this old one of race, for while some of the Tatars, like the Osmanli Turks and the Turkmans, are Sunni Mohammedans, the Persians are Shiahs, who reject and abominate the three first Khalifs and honour Ali almost as much as the Prophet himself. Here, however, they live peaceably enough together. The Tatar is mostly tall and robust, with a round face, rather prominent cheek-bones, a short nose, and small eyes. The Persian is slim, lithe, stealthy, and cat-like in his movements; his face is long, of a clear yellowish tint, his eyes dark and rather large, nose aquiline, eyebrows delicately arched. The Tatar is inclined to be open; he is faithful to his word, and more (inclined to force than to fraud; the Persian has the name of being the greatest liar in the East. "In Iran no man believes another" has become in these countries almost a proverb. With these moral disadvantages, the Persians are no doubt in many ways a superior race, industrious and polished even in the dregs of their civilisation, after centuries of tyranny and misgovernment. In their time they produced great men, rulers such as Kai Khosru (the just Nushirvan) and Shah Abbas the Great; poets like Firdusi and Omar Khayyam; metaphysicians whose names are hardly known in the West. Their carpets and silks and metal work are still full of exquisite taste and finish. But modern Persia, from all that one can hear, is more execrably misgoverned than Turkey itself. The duty of the governor of a province or town is simply to squeeze as much money as he can out of the inhabitants; his methods are the bastinado, impalement, crucifixion, burying up to the neck in the ground, and similar tortures.

Besides these aboriginal races, Georgians, Mingrelians, Caucasian mountaineers, and Armenians, and the incomers of old standing, such as Tatars and Persians¹⁷, there

¹⁶ [These Turkman tribes have, since the above was written, been subdued by Russia. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

¹⁷ A recent Russian statistical estimate gives the number of Turks and Persians in Transcaucasia at 790,000, that of the Steppe - Tatars at 90,000.

is what may be called a top-dressing of recent immigrants from Europe, mostly Russians and Germans. The Russians, with one exception, consist of the officials, who generally consider Russia as their home, almost as our Indian civilians consider England, and intend to return to it when their work is over. The exception is formed by the various sects of dissenters whom the Government, fearing their disturbing political and social influence, has banished, or at least transferred, to these remote seats. They are mostly industrious, well-disposed people, morally, if not intellectually, above the level of the rest of the peasantry, who live in large villages, exactly like those of Central Russia, and keep themselves quite apart from the surrounding native population.¹⁸ Still more distinct are the Germans, of whom there are several colonies, the largest, established in Tiflis, numbering some four or five thousand souls. They came hither from Württemberg about sixty years ago, driven out by an obnoxious hymn-book. In respect of education and intelligence, they are of course far above any of the natives, while their Protestantism prevents them from intermarrying with, and therefore from sensibly affecting, their Russian neighbours. They have lost, if they ever possessed, the impulse of progress; their own farms are the best in the country, and their handicraftsmen in Tiflis superior to the Georgians or Persians; but they are content to go on in their old ways, not spreading out from the community, not teaching or in any way stimulating the rest of the population.

All these races live together, not merely within the limits of the same country, a country politically and physically one, but to a great extent actually on the same soil, mixed up with and crossing one another. In one part Georgians, in another Armenians, in a third Tatars, predominate; but there are districts where Armenians and Georgians, or Armenians, Georgians, and Tatars, or Tatars and Persians, or Persians, Tatars, and Armenians, are so equally represented in point of numbers that it is hard to say which element predominates. This phenomenon—so strange to one who knows only the homogeneous population of West European countries, or of a country like America, where all sorts of elements are day by day being flung into the melting-pot, and lose their identity almost at once—comes out most noticeably in the capital of Transcaucasia, the city of Tiflis. Here six nations dwell together in a town smaller than Brighton, and six languages are constantly, three or four more occasionally, to be heard in the streets. Varieties of dress, religion, manners, and physical aspect correspond to these diversities of race.

The traveller's or interpreter's *lingua franca* of Eastern and Southern Transcaucasia and the Caucasus generally is what the Russians call Tartar (or rather Tatar), but what we should call Turkish, as it differs from the Osmanli of Constantinople only in being somewhat rougher, and having adopted fewer foreign words. The official language, and that which in a civilised city like Tiflis is usually the general means of intercourse between persons of different nationalities, is Russian,

¹⁸ These dissenters, or some of them, are from time to time very harshly treated by the Russian Government.

which, in spite of its difficulty, is learnt and spoken by a great many Armenians and Persians, and by most of the German colonists. In Georgia itself and the region farther west, Imeritia and Mingrelia, Georgian carries one pretty well through, the dialects of these peoples apparently belonging to the same parent stock.

These peoples inhabit the more or less level country south of the Caucasus. Besides them, there is a multitude of mountain tribes of whom I have said something in the last preceding chapter, but who are far too numerous and too diverse in their character to be described at length. Probably nowhere else in the world can so great a variety of stocks, languages, and religions be found huddled together in so narrow an area as in the Caucasian chain between the Euxine and the Caspian. It is as if every nation that passed from north to south, or west to east, had left some specimens of its people here behind to found a kind of ethnological museum. Of some of these tribes, especially of those inhabiting Daghestan and the Eastern Caucasus generally, hardly anything is known, that is, scientifically known: I doubt if an enumeration of them exists in any book.

All these tribes and regions, both of the mountain and of the plain, have now accepted the rule of Russia. The country is quiet from sea to sea. Save for an occasional outbreak among the Suans when the tax-gatherer or land-surveyor makes his appearance, one may travel unharmed through mountain and plain with a small escort, or perhaps unescorted altogether. It is surprising enough when one remembers how unsafe places nearer home are, and how long it took to suppress private war and brigandage in civilised Europe. The Russian military organisation deserves part of the credit, but even more is to be attributed to the sort of simplicity of manners which many of these tribes retain, to the absence of travellers to be plundered, to the isolation in which they live, separated from the world and one another by prodigious mountain masses. Some of them are pagans to this day, and others who, like the Suans, call themselves Christians, have preserved nothing of it but the internal arrangements of a church and one or two ceremonies whose meaning has been long since forgotten. Often they mix it with paganism, much in the fashion of the Tcheremiss of whom Mr. Wallace tells the story that he sacrificed a foal to the Virgin Mary. Much remains to be done in investigating the customs and beliefs, as well as the languages, of these people, and it is surprising to find that so few of those assiduous Germans who explore every corner of human knowledge should have been at work here.

That Russian influence, bringing science and civilisation in its train, should not have penetrated the hidden nooks of these mountains, may well be understood. One is less prepared to find how little it has changed the accessible regions of Georgia and Mingrelia, where, although the capital is a little Paris in its way, the country parts remain much what they were a century ago. The reason, however, soon discloses itself to a traveller, that Russian government is before all things military. The first object thought of is the movement of troops, the organisation of the army, the planting of fortresses and barracks. This was natural and necessary while the war in the Caucasus lasted, but

since 1864, when the Tcherkesses of the west submitted, the same system seems to have been maintained. Such roads as have been made, and they are few, were made almost wholly for military purposes, and a sort of military atmosphere still pervades all Transcaucasia. While the Dariel military road cost £4,000,000, and Daghestan is traversed by two or three beautiful lines of road with iron bridges over the torrents, many fertile parts of European Russia are almost without any means of internal communication.¹⁹ An enormous army, something like 150,000 men, is kept in these provinces always on a war footing. Upon this force the Government has had to spend vast sums, and consequently there has been neither the money nor the thought and care that are needed to bestow upon the material development of the land and the intellectual development of the people. Nor is this a process for which the Russians have yet proved themselves to have a gift. They have a wonderfully elaborate system of government, but the machinery is so complicated that the force is spent in making it move at all, and hardly reaches the material to be acted upon. The effect, therefore, considered as a means of improvement, is small in proportion to the cost (poorly as the *employees* are paid) and to the number of officials at work. And the civil service loses that sense of initiative which is so precious in half-civilised countries. They go on working their bureaux among these Asiatics much as if they were in Novgorod or Riga, forgetting that what is wanted is not to maintain the existing state of things, but to improve it, to enlighten and stimulate these backward races.

For some time past the whole Caucasus (*i.e.* both Transcaucasia and the governments immediately north of the mountains) has formed a separate administrative division of the Russian empire, governed by a lieutenant who is directly responsible to the Czar.²⁰ The lieutenant was in 1876 the Grand Duke Michael, a brother of Alexander II., who succeeded in 1867 to Prince Bariatinski, the conqueror of Shaml. Like all, or nearly all, of the Imperial family, he has been personally courteous and popular, and was said to discharge his official duties well. The higher offices, both military and civil, are of course filled by Russians, many of them, as everywhere in the empire, of German extraction, or else by Armenians. All subjects, however, are admissible to office; this has been long a tradition of Russian administration,²¹ and it is no doubt one reason of its success in conciliating the good-will of its subjects, wherever there has not been, as

¹⁹ [Railways have, however, been of late years greatly extended in Russia. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

²⁰ Transcaucasia and Daghestan consist of the following six governments, whose respective populations I append: — Tiflis, 650,000; Erivan, 436,000; Eliravetpol, 503,000; Baku, 486,000; Kutais, 650,000; Daghestan, 450,000. [These numbers have now (1896) all increased. The latest figures I have been able to obtain, dating from 1889, are as follows: — Tiflis, 819,264; Erivan, 677,491; Elizavetpol, 753,395; Baku, 744,930; Kutais, 955,000; Daghestan, 597,356. To these must now be added the government of Kars, including most of the territory ceded by the Turks in 1878-79 (the rest belongs to Kutais); population, 237,114. The Caucasus is now no longer a separate lieutenancy. — *Note to Fourth Edition.*]

²¹ [I am informed that it is now (1896) much less observed than it was in 1876, Russia having become jealous both of Georgians and of Armenians. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

in the dismal case of Poland, a vehement race and religious hatred to begin with between conquerors and conquered. The sort of good-nature and susceptibility to impressions which is so marked a feature in the Russian character makes them get on far better with strange races than either we or the Dutch or the Spaniards have ever been able to do. It is not occasional acts of cruelty, it is not even a permanently repressive system, that makes conquerors hated nearly so much as coldness, hauteur, contempt, an incapacity to appreciate or sympathise with a different set of customs and ideas. Doubtless the English govern India far better than the Russians do their Asiatic dominions. That is to say, we do more to promote the welfare of the people and administer a pure justice, and we hold ourselves far more impartial in religious matters. For though Russia does not interfere with Islam, and has had the prudence to respect the Armenian Church, she is hostile to both Roman Catholic and Protestant missions, and does her best to advance her own Church in every way. Nevertheless there does not seem to be either in the Caucasian countries or in the south and east of European Russia, where so many strange races live beneath the sceptre of the Czar, so much bitterness of feeling among the subjects as there is towards ourselves, among certain sections of the better-educated class, in India, or to the French in Algiers now, and in the West Indies formerly. Perhaps this is partly because the Russians leave their subjects more to themselves, while we try to improve them; and the fact that in Georgia there is no distinction of faith or of colour between the two races has something to do with it. The Tatar Mohammedans, however, do not seem to have anything to complain of, either here or at Kazan on the Volga, where so many of them live, and one never hears that they are disaffected to the Czar, in spite of the long strife of the middle ages and the fanaticism of the Russian peasantry. So that, after all, there seems to be a good deal in the difference of manner with which we and they behave to inferior races. With us, every word and look betrays a sense of immeasurable superiority. Sometimes we are brusque, sometimes we are politely condescending, but we are always at bottom contemptuous, and contempt makes deeper wounds than violence. In India and China the fault naturally reaches its climax, but the whole continent of Europe can hardly be wrong in accusing us of a milder form of it; indeed, every Englishman who is honest with himself must admit that whenever he travels in a foreign country, he is conscious of some stirrings of this haughty insular spirit. Among the Romans there must have been plenty of this spirit in their era of conquest. The Spaniards have given much offence in the same way. The Americans, with all their self-complacency, are comparatively free from it. But the Russians have really very little of it. Perhaps they would be stronger if they had more; but at any rate its absence largely covers or atones for some of their defects as a conquering and governing power.

The upshot of this digression is that Transcaucasia is on the whole a fairly contented and peaceable part of the Czar's dominions, and that this is due partly to the apathy of the Russians, partly to their good-nature, partly to their being in religious matters in sympathy with the faith of so large a part of their subjects. In the autumn of

1876, when war with Turkey was daily expected, no one seemed to have any fear of an insurrection even among the Lesghians, though it was only some twenty years since they used to swoop down from the mountains and carry off landowners from their country-houses a few stages out of Tiflis. Since Shamył's surrender in 1859, there had been but one attempt at a rising in Daghestan, and that speedily ended by the head of the leader being sent by his own people to the Russians at Tiflis. In the summer of 1877, news came of a disturbance among the Mohammedan Tchetchens, who live to the north of the Caucasus, south-east of Vladikavkaz. It did not prove serious; and the idea which some people in Europe entertained of its spreading westward to the Black Sea, where the Turks had effected a landing, and of a general rising among the Caucasian tribes, showed how little Europe knew of these countries. The Circassians, whom the Turks were supposed to be endeavouring to excite, were too few to be formidable: most of them perished or emigrated in 1864; the Abkhasians, who are left along the coast about Sukhum, are fickle and inert;²² the Imeritians, Mingrelians, and Gurians towards Batum are Christians, a people not much inclined to fight for anybody, and certainly not against the Czar; among the remaining tribes there is no community in race, language, or religion which could enable them to co-operate were they ever so disaffected. The only thing that could have made an insurrection among any of them dangerous to Russian movements would have been a seizure of the Dariel military road, and of that there was no likelihood.²³ The same laws, the same mechanism of courts, the same educational system, omitting diversities of detail, obtain in these provinces as in European Russia. The great emancipation of the serfs, which here took place on the 1st of December 1866, was carried out much upon the same lines as elsewhere; the peasantry of Georgia and Mingrelia, where villenage, turned by the Russians into serfdom, prevailed from the middle ages downwards, are now all free, and the ancient, semi-feudal jurisdictions of the Mingrelian and Imeritian nobles have been replaced by the new-modelled Russian courts. Practically, indeed, education is still more backward than it is in Europe. There are comparatively few elementary schools; the upper schools are said to be poor, and are much hampered by difficulties of language, for the school-books in every subject are Russian, though Russian is a foreign tongue to the immense majority of the pupils.²⁴ There is no university nearer than Kharkof or Odessa; the necessity for one in Tiflis is admitted, but the money is not forthcoming, since considerable salaries would be needed to tempt learned men so far

²² [The latest figures give only 4100 Mohammedans in the district of Sukhum Kaleh, where the Abkhasians live. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

²³ [The Dariel road is now less important as a military route because Russia has both the Black Sea and the Caspian over which she can send troops and stores to Transcaucasia, and has a line of railway all the way from Batum on the former to Baku on the latter sea. She commands the seas, having no possible opponent on the Caspian, and nothing to fear from the (now rotting) fleet of Turkey on the Black Sea. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

²⁴ [In this respect things have not advanced much since 1876. The last figures I have seen give for the government of Kutais, for instance, only 28,000 children in schools of all kinds out of a total population of not much short of a million. And the schools are said to be very inferior. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

from home, and all the money that can be got is wanted for the army and railways. Of literature, one of course expects to find very little, and except in the capital there is no public to care for it. Agriculture is much what it may have been five centuries ago, witness the implements used. The plough is a ruder contrivance than that which Hesiod describes; no wonder that a large team is needed to drag it through the hard dry earth. Just outside the houses of Tiflis I have seen no less than sixteen oxen yoked to a single plough. The want of a market discourages improvements in tillage, as well as trade generally, for although there is a railway to the Black Sea, with steamers thence to Odessa and Constantinople, as well as one or two great roads through the country, such as that to Erivan, there are no roads of the second order to bring produce to the railway from places lying even a few miles away. The manufactures, as already remarked, are mostly of what we should call Persian goods, or of arms, which the Georgians chase most tastefully, and other articles in metal, silver flagons, belts, daggers, and so forth. Things needed for ordinary life, such as cutlery, crockery, glass, paper, cotton goods, are mostly brought from European Russia. What export trade there is—and it is not, considering the resources to be drawn upon, of any great consequence—is mostly in carpets and silks, made in the Tatar country towards the Caspian or among the Persians of Lenkoran, naphtha from Baku, and woods, especially box-wood and walnut roots, from Mingrelia and the south-west slopes of the Caucasus.²⁵ Nature has made the country rich, but the course of events has not brought to it that which a country needs to develop its riches, capital and enterprise.²⁶ Both must come from without, and at present Russia can spare neither. Her capital is all wanted at home; her peasants, except some sects of dissenters who have been deported hither by the Czars, have not crossed the mountains to colonise, nor are they the sort of colonists that change the face of a country as Americans do. They are uneducated, attached to their old ways, unreceptive of new ideas even in a new land.

If it is hard to convey an impression of the general character of Transcaucasia, the reason possibly is that it has not one general character, but two or three. It is like a mixed tissue, whose colour seems to vary according as the light falls this way or that upon it. There is no place in Europe except Constantinople, and probably few places in the world, where one feels in the middle, so to speak, of so many cross-currents, so

²⁵ [The supply of walnut and box is said to be now (1896) nearly exhausted, and such cargoes of these woods as are exported are the produce, not of Transcaucasian forests, but of those which clothe the mountains in Persia at the southern extremity of the Caspian. A good deal of oak timber is said to be now sent from Batum. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

²⁶ [Since 1876 plenty of foreign capital, mostly English, has come into the country, and its natural resources have been largely developed. The chief centre of this development has been the oil-field of Baku, where in the year 1895 more than 6,000,000 tons of crude oil were produced. In that year 1,040,000 tons, mostly of oil for burning, were exported from the ports of Batum and Novorossisk. The rest, including a vast quantity of what are called “residues,”—that which remains when the burning oil has been taken off, — went to the interior of European Russia, where these residues are largely used as fuel in manufacturing industries. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

many diverse associations of the past and possibilities for the future. Perhaps this puzzling, pleasing complexity, creating a desire to predict as well as to explain, and a sense of the difficulty of prediction, is the thing which makes the country so full of interest. It is Eastern—Eastern not only in the dry, bare glowing landscape (I speak chiefly of the Caspian basin), but in the look of the villages, the bazaars, the agriculture, the sense of immobility. Yet many Oriental features are wanting. It is Christian, to begin with. The ruined castles of the nobility, with peasants' dwellings clustering beneath them, have an air of Western feudalism. In the large towns, and along the great roads, one feels the influence of Russia, and the influence of Russia, superficially at least, suggests the influence of France. The streets are filled with men in uniform; the hotels, where the town is big enough to have more than a wretched *duchan*, or public-house, are kept by Frenchmen. You have intelligence and polish in the towns, and in the country the blankest ignorance and the most primitive rudeness. The telegraphic wire runs along a road on each side of which there lie regions almost unexplored, whose inhabitants worship unknown deities and speak unknown tongues. This contrast gives all the idea of a new country, like Western America or one of our colonies; yet here one feels at every step that the country is old, with a civilisation which, though it never blossomed, never quite withered up, a civilisation older than our own. Seeing the ancient churches and castles, most of which have some legend attached to them (though such legends are as seldom poetical as they are trustworthy), one has an odd sort of sense of being in a country which has had a history, but a history that never emerged from twilight, which hardly anybody knows, and which it is not easy to find the means of knowing. In Eastern Russia and Siberia you acquiesce in the fact that there never was any history; the past is a blank, and must remain so. In Asia Minor, on the other hand, you are within the circle of Greek and Roman civilisation; everybody, from Herodotus downwards, has something to tell of its cities and peoples. But Georgia, and the regions immediately round it, have been always the frontier land of light and darkness, a battlefield of hostile empires and religions; first of the Roman empire and the Persians, then of Christianity and fire-worship, then of Christianity and Islam, then of Persians and Turks, lastly of Russia against both the Sultan and the Shah. One finds traces in the buildings and the art of the people of all these influences—of the Greek traders who frequented the markets of the Euxine; of the Byzantine emperors, who held sometimes more, sometimes less of the country, Justinian having pushed forward his garrisons as far as the Upper Kur and Heraclius as far down as Tavriz; of the Genoese, who monopolised the Black Sea trade in the later days of Byzantine rule, and had their settlements all round its coasts; of the Persians and Armenians, who came as conquerors or immigrants. There is a wonderful harvest awaiting the archaeologist here, and the labourers are still few.

With this curious sense of a complex and almost unexplored past, the traveller has a still stranger feeling of perplexity as to the future. Transcaucasia is so rich by nature, so important by position, that nobody can doubt it has a considerable part to play in

history. What will that part be? Are commerce and culture likely to advance? Can Russia maintain her hold on these peoples? Will they themselves be melted down into one nation, and if so, what is the element, out of the many now contending, that will ultimately prevail?

So far, little or no assimilation among the various races of the country has taken place. In the towns they get somewhat more mixed together as trade grows and communications are opened up. But they are not fused, and with one insignificant exception they do not seem on the way to become fused. For this there are several obvious causes. The chief races are in point of numbers pretty equally balanced, so that no one of them is able to absorb the other. Neither is any one sufficiently superior in intellect and force of character to take the lead and impress its type upon the whole mass. The Russians, as being the rulers and the most civilised, might be expected to be able to effect this, but it must be remembered that they are not very numerous, consisting only of the upper officials, of the soldiers, who are a transitory element in the population, and of some isolated settlements of dissenting peasants. Moreover, they are not thoroughly civilised themselves, and cannot impart what they have not got. Civilisation in Russia is like a coat of paint over unseasoned wood; the unsoundness of the material is not at once detected, but it may fail when tested. A further obstacle is to be found in the differences of language and manners between the various Transcaucasian peoples, differences greater than those that separate Frenchmen from Spaniards or even from Englishmen; differences which might of course yield to the influences of commerce and a common participation in the working of free institutions, but which prolong themselves from generation to generation under a bureaucratic despotism which treats the people merely as taxpayers to be kept in order, which does something for them, but nothing by or through them. General compulsory service in the army, which has not yet been introduced here,²⁷ might in time diminish this sense of separation; nothing else seems likely to do so.

Finally, and this is the chief cause of the mutual repulsion of the atoms, there is the religious difficulty. It is of course greatest between the Tatars, the Lesghians, Tchetchens, and other Caucasian peoples, and the Persians, all of whom are Mohammedans of the Sunni or Shiah persuasion, and the Christians. So far as one can see, there is not much active Mohammedan fanaticism in these countries; even among the Lesghians it has very much cooled down from the heat of ShamyI's days. No one in Tiflis seemed in 1876 to fear that the Czar might be embarrassed in any war with Turkey by the disaffection of his own Muslim subjects. The Persians hate all Turks worse than they hate Christians, and may even, to the extent of their very limited power,

²⁷ [General service in the Russian army was introduced about 1886, even for the Christian tribes of the mountains, the Muslims paying a tax instead, but does not seem to be strictly enforced in some districts. Recruits are usually kept isolated and sent to serve in distant parts of the empire, as Austria, fifty years ago, was wont to send her Magyar conscripts to Dalmatia and her Italians to Galicia. I am told that Georgians are seldom allowed to rise to high posts in the army till they are well advanced in life. — Note to Fourth Edition .]

side with Russia in the quarrel The Tatars are a simple folk of shepherds, carriers, highwaymen, with no sense of the “solidarity of the Turkish race,” and no desire to draw the sword against the infidel. But since religion is the main influence that governs the lives of these peoples, is indeed the only intellectual life they have, and makes itself felt in all their customs and sympathies, it erects a barrier hardly to be crossed between them and the Christians. The Armenian peasantry of the Araxes valley seem to live much in the same way as their Tatar neighbours; their villages are little better, nor are they less illiterate. But one never hears of intermarriages nor any sort of *rapprochement* between them. Among the Christians themselves, the separate existence and strongly national character of the Armenian Church keeps its children apart not only from Protestant Germans, but from those who own the Orthodox Eastern faith. And it is really only where such a religious repulsion does not exist, as, for instance, between Russians and Georgians, that any social amalgamation goes on.²⁸

An able traveller who visited these countries several years ago, and has written some interesting remarks upon them,²⁹ suggests the probability of their growing into a Transcaucasian state independent of Russia. Admitting that the army and the administration of the Caucasus have already a certain amount of distinctive character, the facts above stated seem to oppose themselves to such a prospect. To an observer in Tiflis now there seems hardly more likelihood of a Russian hero, however able or ambitious, making himself the sovereign of a kingdom of the Caucasus than there is of a Viceroy of India revolting from the English Queen.

There is no unity among these races, no common national feeling to appeal to, nothing on which a national kingdom could be based. Nothing, in fact, keeps them together but the Russian army and administration, and the loyalty of both these to the Czar is that which keeps Russia herself together, rising as it does almost to the dignity of a national worship. A very extraordinary concurrence of circumstances must be imagined to make the rebellion of a Russian general have any prospect of success, while a peaceable separation of these provinces, so valuable in a strategical point of view, is even less likely. Moreover, they are every day being brought nearer and nearer to the heart of the empire. Since the completion of the railway from Rostof on the Don to Vladikavkaz at the north foot of the Caucasus, the post which leaves Moscow on Sunday night can reach Tiflis on the Friday morning, having to traverse only 126 miles of road from the terminus to Tiflis itself. The project of a railway over the mountains to supersede even this piece of road travelling, and to enable troops to step into a railroad car on the Neva and step out of it on the Kur, is not likely to be carried out for many years to come, for its cost would be prodigious, and other military communications, that, for instance, from Orenburg to Tashkend, are more pressing.³⁰ But as Southern Russia

²⁸ [This process of amalgamation has stopped of late years, owing to the revival of national feeling among the Georgians. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

²⁹ Mr. Ashton Dilke, in the Fortnightly Review, some years ago.

³⁰ [Now that Russia has made her Transcaspian railway from the south-east coast of the Caspian to Samarcand, and is continuing it thence to Andijan and Tashkend, a line from Orenburg to Tashkend is less needed than it was in 1877. It

fills up by the movement of population which is continually going on from north to south, the Transcaucasians will seem less and less remote, and will be connected by more active relations of trade and social intercourse with the European side of the Caucasus. Already the opening of the railway to Poti on the Black Sea,³¹ whence steamers run regularly to the Crimea and Odessa, has made intercourse with the mother country easier and more frequent, and strengthens the unity of sentiment between Holy Russia and her children in these outlying provinces.

Improbable, however, as the separation of Transcaucasia seems, its Russianisation, in anything more than administration, seems almost as distant. It is not well governed, being, like so much else in the Empire, both over-administered and ill-administered. In material prosperity, in the diffusion of light, morality, refinement, it is advancing very slowly. Germans, or Frenchmen, or Americans, would probably have effected far more in seventy years of occupation than the Russians have done. But compare it with the condition of Georgia or Mingrelia under their own princes, or, still better, compare it with that of the neighbouring territories of the Sultan or the Shah, which are daily going back, where there is absolutely no security for life, honour, or property, and its fortunes appear happy indeed.

Supplementary Observations (Fourth Edition)

The account of Transcaucasia contained in the foregoing chapter is, as I am informed by trustworthy persons who have very recently travelled in the country, still true in all its main features; and I have, therefore, not altered the substance of the text, while correcting in footnotes those statements which need some modification or addition in order to make them apply to the present time. There are, however, five important changes which the last twenty years have brought with them, and which need to be specially noted.

- I. In 1878, by the Treaty of Berlin, in this point partly confirming and partly varying the Treaty of San Stefano, a considerable piece of territory adjoining Transcaucasia on the south-west was ceded to Russia by Turkey. This territory included the harbour of Batum, which has now become the principal port of Transcaucasia on the Euxine, with the fortresses of Kars and Ardahan. Its population was chiefly Armenian in the eastern, largely Mohammedan in the western half.
- II. Since 1877 there have been considerable emigrations of Mohammedans from different parts of the country into Turkey. The first to go were the Lazés, who dwelt in the mountains behind Batum. The Turks made no proper arrangements for their

seems probable that before long a line may be constructed across the Caucasus, perhaps by the Dariel, [perhaps farther west, so as to strike the Black Sea at Sukhum Kalek. A line is now in construction from Tiflis to Kars. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

³¹ [This railway now runs all the way to Batum on the Black Sea and to Baku on the Caspian. — Note to Fourth Edition.]

reception, and many perished of hunger or disease near Constantinople.³² Somewhat later many Muslims went from Daghestan, leaving whole districts empty; but of these some are said to have returned, finding themselves worse off under the Turks. In some places Russian peasants have been brought in by the Government to fill the vacant space, land being refused to the Armenians, whose number it was not desired to increase. These settlers, however, do not always prosper. Those planted along the Black Sea coast have suffered severely from fever; and those who survive are said to be apt to become Georgianised, thereby defeating the object of the Government which carried them so far south.

- III. In 1886 a railway was opened all the way from Tiflis to Baku, thus bringing the Black Sea into easy connection with the Caspian, and opening a new and important route for trade from Northern Persia and Central Asia, while at the same time stimulating the development of the great oil-field at Baku. The production and refining of mineral oils has now become the chief industry of Transcaucasia, and the traffic on the railway has immensely grown. Much European capital has come into the country, and much more would come in were the administration a better one.
- IV. The Armenian element in the population of Transcaucasia has largely increased, not only by the addition of the territory taken from the Turks in 1878, but by the growth of the Armenians in Tiflis and other towns. National sentiment among them has become far stronger and more general, chiefly owing to the sufferings of the unhappy members of their faith and race in Turkey, and to the movement for endeavouring to secure some sort of local autonomy for the Armenian provinces of the Sultan. Patriotic Committees have been formed in Tiflis; and it is supposed that from there some sort of propaganda has been carried on, though, so far as I know, no anti-Russian feeling has been shown, and no plans unfriendly to Russian authority formed. The movement has excited the suspicion and alarm of the Russian authorities. Even before it took definite shape, they had begun to look askance on everything Armenian, and in particular to discourage the use of the Armenian language. They have now adopted a strongly anti-Armenian policy, treating Armenian schools with marked disfavour—200 are said to have been shut—admitting few Armenians as officers in the army, and closing (so one is told) the path of promotion to Armenians in the public service of Transcaucasia.
- V. In 1876 national feeling among the Georgians seemed to be at a low ebb. It has since grown apace. The change began when, soon after the death of the Czar Alexander II., his successor changed the liberal policy of that excellent monarch, dismissed his chief minister, General Loris Melikoff (himself an Armenian), and authorised the methods of repression which have been since followed. This revival has shown itself in the increased use of the national dress and of the national

³² In 1880 I saw many of them dying patiently from fever and starvation near Ismid.

language, in a drawing away from Russians, as indicated by the diminution of intermarriage between the races, but most of all in the development of a literature, full of life and inspired by an ardent patriotism. Ancient Georgian writings are being republished, and many new writers have arisen. There are at present one daily and three weekly newspapers, as well as two monthly magazines, published in Georgian, — a remarkable fact, considering the smallness of the nation, and the extreme smallness of the educated class. (Among the peasantry, however, the national sentiment is, in its way, not less strong.) The women, who are keenly patriotic, have taken a prominent part in the movement. The Russian Government, which of course desires the complete Russification of the country, does its best to check this tendency, discourages the use of the Georgian language in schools and otherwise, and is endeavouring to assimilate the Georgian liturgy in all respects to the Russian, and to place Russian prelates over it. Disturbances have more than once occurred among the students at the theological seminary owing to this policy.

Although I gather that Russia is less popular to-day among the native inhabitants of Transcaucasia than she was in 1876, and that no real success has attended her efforts to Russianise them, there is no reason to think that her political hold on the country is substantially weaker. She has an overwhelming military force, and has greatly improved her lines of communication with Europe. There is no active disaffection against her government, and nothing less than a great political change affecting the whole Russian Empire seems likely to bring about the detachment of these Asiatic provinces. But they are not becoming, and there is no present prospect that they will become, any more truly Russian, socially and linguistically, than they were twenty years ago. The spirit of nationality, which seems to have waned in most parts of Europe, where indeed its work has been largely accomplished, has spread to these backward countries, and is a potent factor in their politics.