

♪ CASUALS IN ♪
THE CAUCASUS

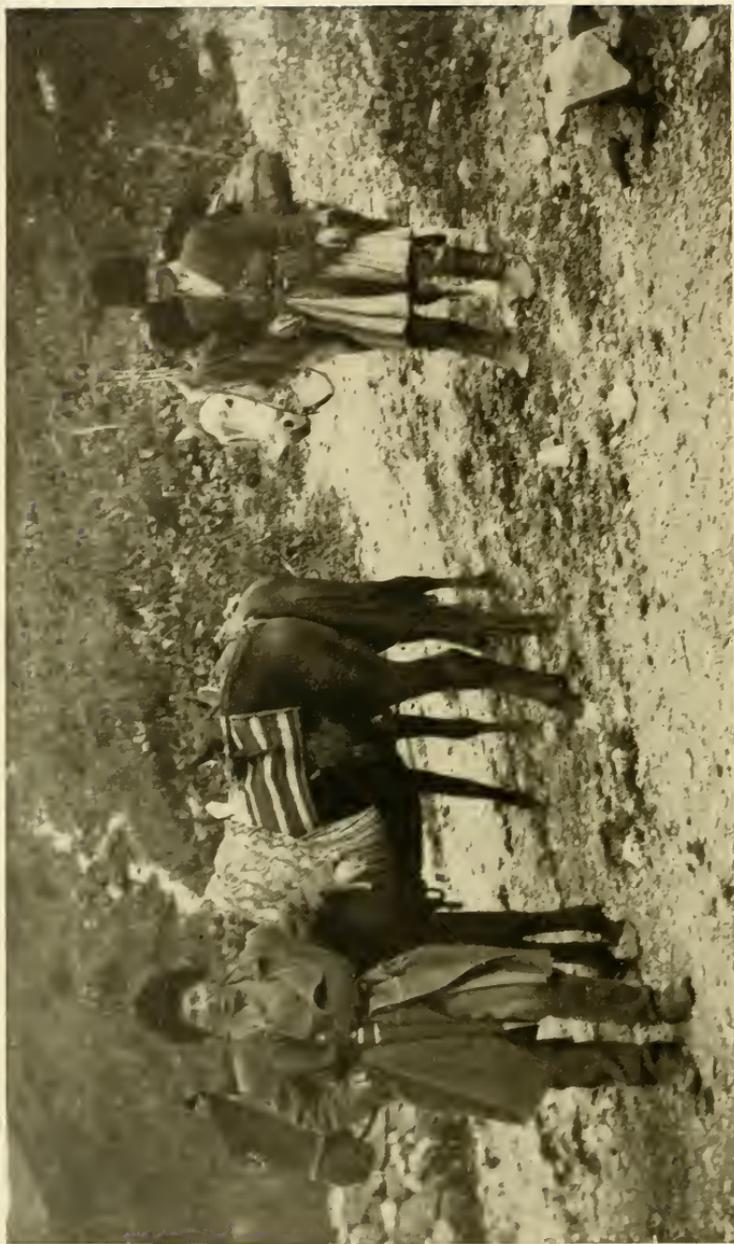
CASUALS IN THE CAUCASUS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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ON THE ROAD IN DAGESTAN

::: CASUALS IN :::
THE CAUCASUS

THE DIARY OF A SPORTING HOLIDAY

::: BY AGNES HERBERT :::

WITH TWENTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO
MY BEST FRIEND

“THE MAN I SPEAK OF CANNOT IN THE WORLD
BE SINGLY COUNTERPOISED”

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CASUALS IN THE CAUCASUS

:: CASUALS IN :: THE CAUCASUS

CHAPTER I

AT GIBRALTAR EN ROUTE

Thinking on the frosty Caucasus,

Richard II.

Will you go with me ?

Much Ado About Nothing.

Met together to rehearse a play.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

At the gate of Europe is an alluring, beckoning, magical country, where the centuries mingle in confused contrast, and Nature plays protagonist to herself.

The Caucasus.

Does not the very name breathe the weird suggestive mystery of a primitive environment, the rough-hewn fascination of barbaric peoples ?

Nowhere else in all the world can be found so myriad-minded and romantic a land, so many-sided, so rich in colours and fertile in forms. Here is rural England, there the green and gold of brackened Scotland, farther seems the great wide African veldt, or the misty haze of deserts where flumes of sand rise

slanting to the sun. And on the near horizons, their lofty peaks wrapped about in an everlasting snow mantle, rise sombre, majestic reminders of the dark and silent North.

Many roads lead to Tiflis, the hub of the Caucasian universe. If you would go from London, the route via Berlin or Vienna to Odessa, thence by boat to Batoum, will land you in Tiflis on the fifth day. But if you think with Robert Louis the Beloved that to travel hopefully is a much better thing than to arrive, a fortnight may be happily expended in the longer way round by Marseilles and direct boat to Batoum; from whence the Caucasian capital is got at by train.

Every individual traveller the world over has his own fixed, unalterable idea as to the best time to visit a country, and nothing, not even an earthquake, ever changes that point of view. And perhaps the arm-chair voyager, sitting amidst a heap of deductions and meteorological records, is the most "viewy" wanderer of all. Only the sportsmen are unanimous, for they are tied to Time and the Game Laws.

"Not before July," says the shikári.

Et ego in Arcadia. July is the month for you and me. Not only because ibex shooting commences, for perhaps you do not want to slaughter ibex—lots of people don't—but for the good reason that in summer you can search for the climate you like the best and be certain of finding it. Winter almost all over the Caucasus is of true Russian variety, where, as De Quincey puts it, "every man is but the co-proprietor with the north wind in the fee simple of his own ears."

I set out from Gibraltar, a roundabout course enough, but taken as a means to a desirable end. A friend, yachting in the Mediterranean, volunteered to convey the little expedition to Batoum if we would but get ourselves so far as the Rock. The idea in going to the Caucasus at all was to see what we should see, to shoot a little, climb a little—not seriously, as climbers understand the word—and generally, tripper-like, do some part of the country. For the rest—the Call of the Wild.

When you leave a barbaric life, and return to what we call civilization, you stifle your regrets by saying over and over to yourself that of course you are emerging from a small and belittling existence, and will now have an opportunity of taking wing as one of the intelligent insects who are privileged to flutter interminably round in the bright light of the world, and it all seems quite true *for a time*. It is something to aim at, you say, surely a far bigger thing than the mere enjoyment of a savage life, indulging savage pleasures. And then there's the warm feeling of contented pride that the mere jungly person is holding his own in the flight with the sparkling-winged ephemerals who have been in the heart of things all the while. But, as a permanency, NO. To get to a corner of the world by yourself—wild creatures have solitary souls—and do a gallop round, tail in air, just when you like, sitting and thinking, also, when you like, or else—just sitting, has an indescribable attraction for some people.

My companions on the little trip to the Caucasus

were my two cousins, Cecily Windus and Colonel Kenneth Baird. We had to take Kenneth along because, for one thing, he spoke Russian much better than his sister, though they were both brought up in St. Petersburg, and for another, he wanted to indulge his mania for anthropology, upon which dry-as-dust thesis he is writing a book.

Cecily had some difficulty in arranging for the desirable trek. That is the worst of being married. It has such tying ties. I don't know that she would have managed it at all but for an opportune series of letters published in *The Daily Mail* every day for an exhilarating fortnight: "Ought husbands and wives to take their holidays apart?"

By the time all sorts of illustrious people, Sir E. Shackleton, Monsieur Blériot, Dr. Cook, Admiral Peary, Madame Tetrizzini, a few Channel swimmers, a Salome or two, and the Zanczigs had given their opinions, backed up by the omniscient Editor himself, that it would indeed be a wonderful thing for the consolidation of the Empire if married people arranged to go away occasionally in totally different directions, Cecily and her husband felt it was up to them to prove the matter one way or the other.

But—I'm forgetting! Forgetting the time-honoured custom of sportsmen, honoured always in the observance and never the breach, on returning home from a big or little shoot, to commence the inevitable book with a comprehensive list of the weapons which did so much execution. It is a beautiful rite, never disregarded, in spite of the fact that every other shikári

who reads the thing condemns each and every rifle with all his heart and soul. The rifles of a hunter are like his own children, nobody else has anything approaching them. They stand on a plane apart.

The difficulty of importing firearms into the Caucasus fines down one's battery to necessitous requirements. It is not "What can I take?" but "What can I do without?" And, in addition to multifarious import worries, there's the vexed question of portorage to limit the supply of rifles with which some prodigal sportsmen approach a country of camel transport. Camels stop off at negotiating the great range, and the mobs of desert ships travelling on the great trade routes 'twixt Persia and the Caucasus make Tiflis their northernmost point. It is their barrier, and the shikári, bound, as a general rule, for the mountains, has to depend on pack ponies, mules, and porters.

To the uninitiated camels are the concomitant of all sportsmen, given the one you have the other, and with these non-understanding people who don't shoot, and don't read shooting books (well, they are dull, fact-y things, aren't they?) the idea of trying to manœuvre a big trip to a successful conclusion minus a camel in the offing would be like taking on the job with a pop-gun.

I once asked an old aunt of mine, who was propounding the camel theory, something of it.

"But why," I queried, "why is it so absolutely necessary for me to get a camel?"

"To carry your things, of course," she answered

confidently. "Who else will carry them, I should like to know?"

It reminded me of the subaltern, just home on leave from India, who was consulted by a friend as to the best way to reach Persia.

"It's somewhere near India, isn't it?" said the young warrior doubtfully.

"Yes."

"Then take a P. and O. liner to Bombay, of course."

"And then?"

"Oh, then take a camel."

As it is necessary to obtain permission to import firearms into the Caucasus, the preliminary steps are best taken some weeks ahead, for the mills of Russia grind slowly if they grind exceeding small. An application through our Embassy at St. Petersburg, stating at what point you wish to take in a rifle or rifles, and the approximate date, results, when the matter has almost faded from your memory, in an intimation, also through our Embassy at St. Petersburg, that the head of the Customs at the place specified has been advised of your imminent arrival, and the permit is granted.

The duty, which is calculated by weight, averages about thirty shillings per rifle, and in spite of all you may say, suggest, or hint, it is insisted that the cases be weighed with the weapons. This is a grand idea, from the point of view of the Customs.

Although, after any amount of palaver, you have passed your rifles, cartridges form no part of the official programme,—a Gilbertian state of affairs enough.

“Here you are,” say the Customs, “here are your rifles. We’re afraid they won’t be much good to you, cartridges being ‘prohibited merchandise.’ Still, here are your rifles.”

Of course, this ridiculous arrangement necessitates smuggling of a real pantomimic variety, of which the officials must be thoroughly cognisant. Kenneth got his ammunition through in a belt slung round his waist, but we didn’t yearn to emulate him. I draw the line at a waist over twenty-four inches, and so does Cecily.

We invented the most ingenious underskirts, regular arsenals, and in little pockets, adroitly stitched up, we smuggled dozens of cartridges—far more than Kenneth carried. The drag and weight was terrific, and they stuck out like crinolines, besides barking our shins rather ; but it couldn’t be helped. I really think the Customs pretend not to notice the little bulges, and knobs, and betraying ridges beneath the garments of nomadic sportsmen. Had anyone knocked against us—! But if countries *will* have such silly laws!

The rifle beloved of Kenneth’s heart, his one ewe lamb of rifles, is a .256 Mannlicher, picked up for 14s. 6d. at a sort of annual remnant sale organized by the L. and N.W. Railway. My cousin maintains that this treasure-trove, purchased for such a trifling sum, is the finest rifle he has. How anyone could forget so large a thing as a rifle I cannot imagine, and the odd part of it is that if you really want to lose a parcel in a railway train you simply can’t, and the thing returns to you, like the bread on the waters, after many days.

I know, because I've tried.

Ever since Kenneth and I viewed those packed railway sheds, and the inspector-in-charge told us that there is a use for all the flotsam and jetsam of the world, I have been trying to rid myself decently of hordes of old prayer-books, heaps of them, cohorts of them. I suppose everyone suffers more or less, only it is more with me, from this glut of old prayer-books. Nobody in England dreams of destroying a prayer-book. It is like the feeling that Hindus have against killing the nilghai. Once bought, the volume sets off blithely on an endless journey down the ages—for even if disaster overtakes it, or you spill a cup of tea over it, you merely put it aside, pension it off as it were, and up it bobs again in later years. Every death in one's family means a further accumulation. And thus it is that dozens and dozens of prayer-books are on my hands. Prayer-books in every stage of decrepitude, prayer-books churches don't want because they pray for people beyond praying for, or because the print is too small, or too large, or something.

Three times I made up a goodly parcel and left them under railway carriage seats, ready to be made useful by the confident-that-nothing-is-wasted-inspector, but they were always traced to me and graciously returned. Some people bring these sort of things off, but I can't.

I heard a bride lately describing the miraculous disappearance of her ivory prayer-book, "the gift of the bridegroom," who evidently had not enough at home.

“It must be awfully hard to lose a prayer-book,” said her confidant, in a most misguided tone of commiseration.

And I was so worked up by my own disabilities in this direction that, although I didn't know either of the speakers, I ejaculated feelingly, “Hard! It's almost impossible!”

But I am digressing. We must back to that joint of mutton we sat down to.

Since Kenneth insisted on taking, and taking only, his beloved foundling, Cecily and I decided on similar rifles. The advantage of being able to exchange cartridges in a land of such scarcity is obvious. We took an ordinary 12-bore shot-gun apiece, and for these it was not necessary to smuggle, because shot-gun cartridges can be bought in Tiflis. Our revolvers were our old 12-bores—more contrabandism!

Tents of any sort can be obtained to order in the Caucasian capital. The tailors of the Tatar Bazaar can make, or, should I say, will tackle, anything from a court gown to a saddlebag.

Kenneth joined Cecily and me at Gibraltar, and we all repaired to the Bristol Hotel for the night, as our promised barque was not yet in the bay.

Kenneth is studiously, carefully soldierly, and walks like an animated ramrod, with a slight limp, as though to emphasize his calling. The lameness is a pose merely, but he has posed so long and so well that he has ceased to be a poseur. He has only once been in action in all his life, and that in his salad days when he was green in judgment. A vigorously contested

affray enough, fought to the death amid the stuffy environs of the Probate, etc., Division of the High Court.

Our evening's quietude was temptingly assailed by an invitation from some friends of Kenneth's to dine, and then go on to watch a rehearsal of a musical comedy by the Gibraltar Amateur Thespians. A very hot time of year to be rehearsing anything, I thought ; but it takes more than temperature to damp the ardour of the amateur theatrical, and the finished affair was to be the principal asset in the entertaining programme designed to please some illustrious visitor due in the autumn.

Femininely unpunctual—the fault of the cab-horse, of course—we arrived at the house of our much-talked-of hostess, who came forward to greet us with the graceful contemplative hauteur of a woman who has been called beautiful by the Society papers so often and so systematically that she had come to believe it to be a fact and not merely an optical illusion on the part of the reporter.

It was quite a wonderful house as houses go in Gibraltar, with family treasures carted out at great trouble and expense from home. The dining-room was done up in what our host called “the Adam's style.” So also was our hostess, truly Adamic in the earlier sense of the word. Charles Lamb would have hailed her as a “furniture wife,” chosen to suit the apartment.

Outside the Adam dining-room and the hostess a joyous dilettantism prevailed, and round the square hall hung samples of the pictures without which no

grandfather of the Victorian era could grandfather properly. What sort of a house would it have been, think you, for imaginative grandchildren to visit if your grandparents had not stood possessed of some of those deep, dark, mysterious oil-paintings which meant so much and told so little?

We paused in front of a large "work," its quarter-yard wide of frame shining in the light. I gazed into its inky cavernous depths with tender reminiscent interest. There was just such another at Grannie's, just as black, just as elusive, just as——

"You are admiring my picture," said our host complacently, trying to keep back the pride of ownership in his voice. "A wonderful thing, isn't it?"

"A remarkable canvas!" I answered diplomatically. And, of course, it *was*. The expanse of surface, divulging nothing, seemed unusually excellent. You know how full of ruts and cracks they so often are.

"Of the Impressionist school, I imagine?" put in Cecily, trying to appear artistically knowing.

"A Velasquez, I think, or perhaps a Rubens, or Rembrandt," said the proud owner, with large-hearted indifference. "You never can tell with these old unsigned pictures. I am sure it is very, very valuable. Any duffer can see how priceless it must be. An artist who saw it last week said it really might be anything. Since then I've been wondering if it could be, by any chance, an early Veronese."

He could trace back the existence of the painting for considerably over two hundred years, and that alone, judging by the mellowing standard which seems

to enhance mysteriously the price of so many quite mediocre pictures, would make it Art, wouldn't it?

What a difference a set value makes to our good opinion. How the charm of anything is heightened by its market value, fictitious or otherwise. The illustrious names of the men who might have painted it endowed the featureless square with an aura of mystical distinction impossible to throw off.

It was something to ten o'clock by the time we got to the room hired for purposes of rehearsal, where we found a bored soldierly-looking man sitting at a dusty table pencilling the music-score.

"Didn't you all know the call was fixed for nine o'clock?" he rapped out. "It is outrageous expecting me to waste my time like this." Then, seeing we were not of the company, he listened uninterestedly to our hostess's introduction of us, said he was a stage-manager, and relapsed into torpor until roused by a few Thespians, who casually strolled in.

"What time do you suppose we shall get this rehearsal over?" asked the Major-Manager. "Have you got your lines up?"

"Mine aren't really worth learning," answered a dissatisfied R.G.A. youth. "The whole thing only covers half a page. But, of course, it is your own lookout. I should have been much better as a principal. A fellow of my attainments presented with half a page and no opportunities of distinguishing myself! I have a great mind to throw it all up, but I don't want to leave you in the lurch."

"Tra-la! Tra-la!" practised somebody's A.D.C.

on the landing. "I say," putting his head round the doorway, "it is silly rot giving me such lines. Fancy singing all that idiotic love nonsense! I shall change. I'd rather be the old fellow. I like that patriotic song of his. How does it go?"

"England, England, there's nothing like old England,
Home of the brave and free!"

"Quite right!" struck in the stout R.E. Major, cast for the part. "Nobody can act what he doesn't understand. One must throw oneself right into it and abandon individuality. I'll be the hero. It is a creation after my own heart. Tra-la! Tra-la! Stands to reason I must have more experience than a young man like you. And above everything the love passages should come naturally and spontaneously."

"Are you here to cast your parts or to rehearse?" asked the Major-Manager in tones of concentrated fury. "There's not a single round peg in a square hole."

"Oh, fie, Major Abdy!" chirruped a kittenish globe-trotting widow. "Do you dare say I make a good old woman, and that's *my* part."

At the last moment, with pomp of artifice and excellence of design, the leading lady arrived, very bored and tired of life generally.

"I've come in a cab, Major Abdy. I suppose you've no objection to charging it to general expenses? Yes, I know the proceeds are for a charity, but charity begins at home, and it wouldn't be an atom charitable to expect me to walk to rehearsal in this heat."

A Dresden-china lady appeared, all pink and white and blue complexion powder, like the front row of the ballet at home. She exchanged steely glances with the leading lady, and talked to the ceiling in a high staccato.

"Late, am I? Well, it cannot be helped. I've been trying on my dress for the second act. Such a glorious colour-scheme! Reseda, and the palest, palest yellow. I shall wear a bunch of cornflowers on my right shoulder. Do I know my lines? I think so. About my shoes, Major Abdy, would you advise heels or not? The General says decidedly *not*."

Persuasively the energetic stage-manager coaxed the chorus into wavering lines.

"Come forward easily. Don't huddle together so. Be animated! Be cheerful! Can't you look as though you were enjoying yourselves? You are a merry crowd of Maori girls, remember, dancing on the beach at Weheka. Throw yourselves right into it! Throw yourselves right into it!"

The Maori girls looked about them aimlessly, as though in search of a cleanly spot on which to precipitate themselves, and seemed to a woman bored almost to tears.

"My husband won't act unless I'm the heroine," said a plaintive fragility, taking the manager's arm confidentially.

"WE SHALL NOT BE READY ON THE ADVERTISED NIGHT UNLESS WE SET ABOUT THIS THING WITH MORE METHOD," roared the harassed man in a megaphone voice. "Have you no idea how that goes? I've told you scores of times."

“Don’t be so unpleasant about it,” retorted the leader of the chorus. “It is too silly to repeat the same thing so often. Much better to go over it once and then trust to luck. What does it matter if we are out of tune? Nobody expects amateurs to keep in with the music.”

The Major, with studied scorn, waved a signally arm again.

“Now then, the basses take it up. I should give over trying to warble if I were you, Johnson. You can’t expect to get a falsetto tremolo on a fog-horn. Mrs. Stacy, you come down left centre.”

In uninterested fashion the “star” sauntered down the room.

“I will begin now,” she said calmly. “Dying! The Maori Chief! I must go to him.”

“You’ll have to put a little more life into it than *that*, you know,” interrupted the Major witheringly. “The Maori Chief is your lover, and he’s taken poison.”

“Of course, I’ll wear the pink dress if you like, dear,” rang out the Dresden-china lady’s staccato. “It wouldn’t suit you one little bit, and it would be such a pity if you wore your wrong colour.”

“Thank you so much,” returned the globe-trotting widow sweetly, “but I arranged long ago to choose that frock. Everyone says it is the newest tint. I won’t dream of letting you sacrifice yourself. It is noble of you, but you’d look a rag in it.”

“I decline to allow you to be so unselfish,” the other replied in baulked accents. “It is possible to carry

self-sacrifice too far. I appeal to you, Major Abdy. Mrs. Curwen must not wear pink. You said so, did you not ? ”

“ Dear me, ladies, I don’t want you to wear anything,” said the Major decisively, looking from one to the other in ill-disguised annoyance. “ I mean, er—er—no specific colour.”

“ Then I wash my hands of the whole affair,” cried Dresden-china tearfully. “ I shall not act. I would never have undertaken the part at all but for the thought of that dream of a dress. You’d hardly believe how well I look in it.”

“ It certainly would require some effort of the imagination,” retorted the triumphant widow ; “ but it doesn’t need the aid of a pink dress to set off my type of looks—you are welcome to the thing. I will wear heliotrope and green.”

“ It was so kind of you to ask me to sing in the chorus, Major Abdy,” murmured a tall, dark girl, turning gratefully to him.

“ Not at all,” he answered abstractedly, “ anyone does for that. I mean, er—er—— Oh, hang it, you understand ! ”

“ I expect four bouquets,” volunteered the chorus leader. “ Two from my husband, and two from the General. I shall order six myself, and have them handed up one at a time. Everybody says it is a shame I haven’t more to do. The General is going to clap all the time I’m on the stage.”

“ We will now take the trio in the second act, please. You might raise your hands a little ! ”

The trio performed some stick-like gestures, and sang a few bars one behind the other.

“Try and make yourselves heard beyond the foot-lights, and it wouldn't be a bad idea to sing in tune just now and again, if only to give the audience an inkling that there is a tune somewhere. You can put your hands down now. You will have to think up a few things for yourselves, you know; I cannot act the entire concern.”

“What we want is more life, what the French call *verve*,” put in a portly dame of majestic presence. “I suggest interpolating a skirt dance here.”

“Anything else you would advise, Lady Brandreth?” inquired Major Abdy, in tones of rising sarcasm.

“Now that is the right spirit, q-u-i-t-e the right spirit! It is much better to know at once where the fault lies. As a spectator I can place my finger on it. The comedy lacks novelty. What do you say to an interlude after the style of Cinquevalli? The Mess Bombardier is an adept.”

“A kind of Barnum's,” said the Major bitterly. “Why not drop the musical comedy, and run a variety show? There isn't a voice among the lot! No”—brutally—“not one.”

“What, sir,” said Mrs. Stacy, bridling, “and I practise four hours a day.”

“That, madam,” shouted the long-suffering man, “is probably the reason why the only house to let in all Gibraltar is next your own. Arrange your own parts! I throw it up.” And before the astonished-into-attention-groups realized it the Major had gone.

In the ensuing excitement the voice of the A.D.C. dominated all the rest.

“Go after him, somebody, can't you? Calm him down for any sake! We're done if we lose him. Good fellow at the bottom, but thinks he knows everything.”

By the time the Thespians had decided on what to do and how to do it we had left and were off back to our hotel, full of regret that we could not remain in Gibraltar long enough to see “The Maori Girl” as a finished article.

CHAPTER II

VOYAGE AND ARRIVAL

To cabin ; silence ! trouble us not.

The Tempest.

The vasty wilds
. . . are as through-fares now, for princes.

Merchant of Venice.

A prince should not be so loosely studied.

2 Henry IV.

AN early message told us that the yacht was in the Bay, and by ten o'clock we were aboard a fine, slim, graceful craft lying in white purity against an old coaling hulk in the anchorage—Beauty and the Beast united. Her owner met us at the gangway, a much-travelled individual and an Arctic explorer of sorts. I say "of sorts" advisedly, because he had never been fortunate enough to get anywhere near the "Great Nail,"—only just beyond the lecture line.

Cecily, reading this part, says it sounds very off-hand and superior to speak of anyone as an individual. But I think, don't you, that it is a proud description? I wish people would call me an individual. I am always a person, a mere person. An individual! Why, it is to be a human Juggernaut, a compeller, an organizer.

Coaling operations completed, the yacht, with bright brass fitments heliographing dazzling shafts of light to the grim grey Rock, steamed slowly down the Bay.

A little felucca, with spotless lateen sails, crossed our course, passing beneath the bows in dangerous proximity in an arresting effort to call attention to a basketful of red mullet glittering in carp-like brilliance. Two energetic Blue sharks chased each other hither and thither in a churning turmoil of spray.

The huge isolated mass grew dim, dimmer yet, its every outline expressing unique aloofness. Wonderful, heart-gripping spot, changeless as the tides.

The years have built up centuries, the swirl and rush of battles have swept about its hoary foundations, the pains, and groans, and griefs of multitudes have endured and passed to nothingness, but the great Rock, in majestic column, stands for Eternity.

We touched at the Piræus, thence across the Ægean Sea to Smyrna, and, heading north, cruised between the islands of the Ægean Sea to the Dardanelles, most wonderful of straits, with its sullen menacing batteries frowning down from the heights.

Next the beautiful yacht slipped like a white sea-bird into the stormless sapphire Marmora, and here Ismidt's Gulf, a deep-set Eastern inlet, tempted us from our course the while some necessary repairs were made to the yacht's engines.

Anchoring off Héréké, Cecily did the industrial side of the place, for here is situated the Royal silk and cloth factory of Turkey, and I went out in a tiny caïque, skirting along a shore fringed with gigantic rushes, amid which the sleek Anatolian buffalo shambled and the heron flew low to his fishing-ground. Here and there a tall Greek in a gay blouse-

shirt, and trousers tucked high up his brown thighs, stood in the water brandishing a wide-mouthed net, and out in the Gulf, beyond a little fleet of pelicans looking like play ships riding at anchor, silvery mackerel, with fins gleaming in the slanting rays of the evening sun, raced in frenzied terror before a shoal of porpoises, whose speed and twists and turns churned the sea to a tossing line of foam. Gulls, with hanging feet, watchful of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, poised low to the water, with alert heads turning slowly from side to side, insidiously intent.

The next afternoon saw us off the Golden Horn. Constantinople at sunset! It comes as near to the city of our dreams as reality can do. The shadowy parterre which divides us from the dim land of Fäery is lifted here, and the lariat of imagination curls about the marble palaces and golden-domed mosques, touching, as with a magician's wand, the snowy minarets and towering pinnacles. In that magnificent structure, that swarthy sentinel amid a white army, with vast domes of black porphyry and gleaming cupolas of beaten gold, a Scheherezade might melt the heart of a Sultan with her tales.

I should have peopled the city but for Kenneth's mundanity. He broke the magic spell rudely, roughly.

"Ripping!" he said, "I call it simply ripping!"

I had gathered the world-old materials Thoreau told us of to make me a path to the stars, and they were used to build a wood-shed!

Since the days of Herodotus how many writers have blunted their pens on the ancient and ever-new theme of Constantinople? And no one of them has brought the Olympic panorama to the level of paper, painted for us the true colour of its glittering turquoise waters, ocean deep to the marge of the land, or shown a tenth part of the beauty of this wonderful marine pathway, stretching from sea to sea.

We were one of a little fleet of ships, ships great and small, for thirty-six hours. Just long enough to negotiate our requests for further "Open Sesame" letters which might help our faltering feet in Caucasian wilds.

Our neighbours from a near-by yacht came to lunch, very up-to-date English people, a youthful husband, and an elderly wife of the restored-ruin variety. She wore the most immaculate yachting kit, and a little sailor hat perched on a rather lop-sided erection of carefully Marcelled tresses.

"In these sort of places," she confided, "I never let Claude out of my sight. Heaven knows what mischief a man might not get into."

With "Claude" safely bottled up in the saloon, our new acquaintance, sitting on deck with Cecily and me, waxed introspective. She said that beautiful scenes and vistas have a great effect upon over-charged hearts, a sort of "Bid me discourse" influence, I imagine, judging by results, though whether the wondrous panorama was answerable for the wholesale confidences of which we were the willy-nilly recipients, or whether some rather sour claret

she had at lunch disagreed, I have never quite fathomed.

The name of a great political celebrity cropped up, and the very sound of it wakened in the heart of our loquacious friend the most hallowed memories, dear, delightful, if to be deplored, memories. Ah, no! She was not blameless, far from blameless. She was proud of that, glad of that. A great friendship with a very great man is almost always a disillusion; but in this case it was otherwise. The two rose to Olympic heights. Every step taken by the celebrity on the Ladder of Fame he owed to her loving ministrations. They were one in the truest sense of the word.

"But why did you not marry him?" asked Cecily, with the utmost banality.

"He was married already," said Madam, clinching that question.

There was no switching her off on to any other topic. The Great Man filled her horizon to the exclusion of all else, and by the time she took her departure we knew the size of his collars, the sort of soap he preferred, why he resigned from the Reform Club, and the back-handed method with which he overcame the intricacies of his evening tie was illustrated in grim detail.

"What does your husband say to all this?" inquired Cecily, in British matronly astonishment.

"He doesn't know," Madam whispered. "It happened, you see, before I married—when I was a mere girl."

And I was reminded, almost to the verge of laughter,

of the penitent at the Confessional relating the ins and outs of a grievous past.

“ When did this terrible affair occur ? ” questioned the reverend Father solemnly.

“ Thirty-two years ago last June, Your Reverence.”

“ Oh, dear me,” exclaimed the priest, brushing the tale aside, “ *that* has been forgiven you long ago.”

“ I know it has,” murmured the penitent ; “ of course I know it has, but I do so love to tell about it ! ”

How I am wandering from the point ! And I often think that with travel books it is the prolonged “ getting there ” which for some occult reason has to be gone through before the taking-off point is reached, that frightens away so many would-be readers. Explanations of anything are so wearisome. Whenever I see them coming in novels I skip, skip on to where, with large margins and many spaces, the people talk.

Past beautiful Therapia we steamed slowly, making but little progress against the strong current running from the Black Sea, which lay at the distant end of the winding water-way in a sheet of glittering silver. Beyond Buyukdere the narrowing strait widened again as its end was neared. Purple-black rocks, jagged and knife-edged, formed a rampart wall on either side, and over their sharp spurs the waves wreathed and curled in a never-ceasing line of foam. Clear of the straits, lying miles apart, haloed by the romance of centuries, we saw the bare Symplegades. A Jason could safely row a fleet of Argos betwixt them now.

The Black, or Stormy, Sea was just now obligingly

bewraying its name, and the somnolent waters rippled to the horizon in even, untroubled expanse. We steamed out into the open, avoiding the coast-line, until we should pick up the Crimean Peninsula, which we did during the next day, passing the entrance to the harbour of Balaclava in the late afternoon.

Here the scenery was of the most enchanting description. Great grey cliffs, whose rocky ramparts cleft the sky line, stood sentinel to little vales where on every point a beautiful villa gleamed white amid the green.

The palace, or castle, of Aloupka, constructed for the great Prince Woronzoff by an English architect, is one of the most arresting features of the coast. It is built in a greenish limestone in a *mélange* of styles. Now it is a modern mansion, or a feudal stronghold, sometimes an Italian palace, or a Gothic turreted cathedral. White marble fountains gleam in forested glades, where the trees shade from darkest olive to the palest emerald. Magnificent terraces are piled one above the other, all vine-clad and crimson with the glowing tints of sun-kissed leaves, backed by the fierce drab pinnacled crags of Aië Petri.

From this point onwards the peninsula is seen at its very best. Everywhere the land falls and rises, rises and falls, curving to its highest point, Tehaderdagh, the Mountain of the Tent, a massive replica of an Arab's home, modelled by Nature's genius.

Livadia, the home of the Dowager Empress of Russia, a real country house, and Orianda, the palace of the Emperor, lie on the mountain side, beautifully

placed, with a pathless panorama over the Black Sea outspread in all its witchery before the windows.

Yalta, in pine-clad heights, next. We did not enter the harbour. No big masts rose up—a few little fishing boats cruised about outside, and chased us inquisitively as we stood out to sea for the night.

The next morning saw us coasting along the shores of lonely, forested Circassia, which streaks along the Black Sea coast for some two hundred miles. At its northern extremity the land lies very low, but it rises to great heights on the Abkhasian frontier.

Here, in its desolation and abandonment, is one of the loveliest corners of the Caucasus, for centuries the abiding-place of the courageous and warlike tribe whose once prosperous villages are lost now in the jungle tangle, whose prolific orchards grow but for the bears.

It cost Russia thousands of men to subdue Circassia, and the inhabitants were only beaten after a stand of many years. Wild, crude forest people, and dwellers in the steppe country beyond, they resisted the Russians because they feared to be bondmen—they who had ever been free as the eagles soaring above the slim sinister peaks. They fought for freedom. That is the only thing worth fighting for in all the world.

It is said by many historians, and I have never seen it disputed, that in the conquering of one valley alone, a little rift fifteen miles long and five across, defended by a thousand tribesmen, Russia lavished twenty thousand lives. As in the highlands of Dag-

hestan, the very country ranged itself in line with its children. To me, the history of the great struggle is one of the most fascinating records of modern times.

So often in England we speak of Circassia as though it were another name for Caucasia, and in the minds of a great many a Caucasian is of necessity a Circassian, as a Circassian is a Caucasian. To term all Caucasians Circassians is a most ludicrous mistake, much the same as calling every Britisher an Irishman. Circassia is but one of the variously named districts of the Caucasus, its people, the Adighé, as they called themselves, one of the many tribes who live in the deep valleys set in the groins of the great mountain chain.

Farther back than we can follow, this Adighé nation had their own representative little Government, run on fine old feudal lines, their Assembly, or Parliament, presided over by a wild chieftain elected by all the minor chiefs and tribesmen of the community. Strange laws were made, and they enforced them, too !

No man was bound to serve in a mere local raid, but everyone old enough to bear arms had to rally round their chieftain when sallying forth against a foreign foe. Chiefs could own no serfs, and the serfs of tribesmen were free to choose another master if the dislike to the one in possession was held by the arbitrators to be warranted by conditions. Clansmen, also, might transfer allegiance to a better chief, and tribal honours, therefore, depended on the goodwill of the people. A splendid system of give-and-take, and a great improvement on the hereditary principle in vogue in so many African communities, where the chieftainship

descends from father to son in the primitive untutored idea that strength—for which the original Goliath of the tribe was selected—passes with the tribal sovereignty. The Circassians made no mistakes of that kind. To secure a chieftainship because he was the son of his father, to succeed by heredity to what might have been his by hardihood, to have power fall to his hand instead of by it, to miss the savage delight of wresting goods from the reluctant gods, to remove the necessity for initiative and incentive was never a part of the programme of a Circassian brave. His motto, if he had one, was “Independence.”

Christianity is supposed to have been accepted by the tribe long ages ago, but they ever possessed their sacred groves and sacrificial shrines, in common with many other of the wild men of the Caucasus. They were what we might call peculiarly enlightened pagans, and continued to be so long after their gathering in to the Islamic fold.

The final subjugation of the Circassians took place in 1864, when the conquered nation, beaten but not bound, refused to accept the rule of the long-withstood enemy, which, in justice it must be said, lies lightly on all the Caucasian tribes, whose national characteristics and customs are allowed full freedom, and, receiving the offer of land in Turkey, arranged to depart thither in a vast body. All their wealth lay in impossible-to-move assets, in fertile lands, rich orchards, and many cattle. The once powerful people, therefore, left their home-land beggared. Small vessels sent from Trebizonde to convey the emigrants were

late in coming, and great sickness broke out among the waiting myriads. When at last the overdue ships did put in an appearance, the accommodation was hideously inadequate, and the hardy mountaineers, accustomed to the fresh air of their slopes and forests, packed like sardines in unwholesome holds, died in hundreds. Some few effected a landing at Tuapsé, only to succumb miserably from hunger and exposure. The remainder, reaching Anatolia, found that Turkish hospitality prepared no welcome for the vagrant farers, who perforce camped anyhow on the seashore in terrible weather.

There is a story of a grand old chieftain, who, rather than die by inches of starvation, or by a drive of his own kinjal (dagger), mounted his horse and rode, calling on the remains of his once mighty clan to follow him, into the Euxine. Tradition says he rides still, and on a wild night, as the sea reins back her white-maned steeds, one whiter than all the rest leads the way, and at the bridle a phantom figure forges onwards, ever onwards to Circassia.

In this hideous *débâcle* two-thirds of the great Circassian peoples perished, leaving as representative of the nation the few hardy mountaineers scattered about the Kouban steppes and the small number of emigrants who survived the *sturm und drang* of the move.

Desolate Circassia, her beauty no longer for her own people, a hot-bed of fever for all aliens, has not attracted the settler to any appreciable extent. The Russian peasant is not of the stuff of which pioneers

are made. He dislikes a forested country, and prefers his land, an he could choose, of pancake flatness. Homesteads, therefore, in the fair territory are few, roads poor, posts, on the maps, many, but—that is all. A few big estates were parcelled out to Russian nobles, and here and there an enterprising Greek has cleared the land for tobacco. For the rest, a desolation that can be felt as with a touch, a loneliness which ripples in the murmur of the streams, a requiem in the sigh of the wind as it sweeps from the snow-fields across the lands of a nation passed to nothingness.

Abkhasia, with its dangerous rocky coast-line and forbidding cliffs, loomed next on our line of vision, and the low siren song of the caves came out and gave us greeting. Great gaunt crags overhung the gloomy water, and up the boulders the waves broke stormily. The frowning wall gave no hint of the rivers, and pine forests, canyons, and glens and valleys tucked away in the interior, or of the wonderful pasture lands celebrated throughout the Caucasus.

The story of the Abkhas is, to a certain extent, that of the neighbouring tribe, save that whilst many joined in the disastrous exodus to Turkey large numbers submitted to Russia. They are a graft on the Circassian type, just as courageous, just as reckless, deep as their own cavernous caves, lawless as the sea at their gates.

Palgrave, in his *Eastern Studies*, says: "Of the early history of the Abkhasian race little is known, and little is probably to be known. More than two thousand years ago we find them in Greek records

inhabiting the narrow strip between the mountains and the sea along the central eastern coast of the Euxine, precisely where later records and the maps of our own day place them. But whence these seeming "autochthones" arrived, what the cradle of their infant race, to which of the "earth-families," in German phrase, this little tribe, the highest number of which can never much have exceeded a hundred thousand, belonged, are questions on which past and present are alike silent."

Off Poti we got a mist-wreathed glimpse of the western sierras of the great range, looking in vain for double-headed Elbruz, the loftiest summit in Europe. Cloud banks merged with the snow peaks, a world of vaporous whiteness. Southward, over a waste of waters, shadowy outlines shaped themselves into the far, far distant mountains of Armenia.

Myriads of large dolphins played about the yacht's bows, dolphins whose scales radiated a glistening brightness beautiful to see. Natural history teaches us that only as they are about to die does this surprising glory of colour enhance a dolphin's dull charms, but here they all were, very far from the end of things, with skins glinting rainbow-wise in vivid pinks and blues.

Batoum, our disembarking place, rests graciously on the land like a king enthroned. The minarets of many mosques stand out against a background of thickly-wooded hills, which rise in sweeping curves, tier on tier, to a great height, when they push off into the dim sheen of rugged purple peaks. The name

Batoum is derived from the Greek, and means "deep haven." A poetical and apt description, for the water is immensely deep to the marge of the land.

Everything looks very Turkish, in spite of Russianizing influences, and the town itself and its environs do not rank as the healthiest of places. The quinine habit is as general as in the Western States of America. The marshes around have been drained, and health stations established, but the mists and the mosquito are ever present to spread malaria. All the Black Sea coast is a hot-bed for fever, engendered by the swamplands and tropical vegetation.

We anchored close to the quay and were instantly boarded by a little group of uniformed figures, all aglitter in resplendent white and gold, who fluttered up the gangway like a bunch of fritillaries. We thought the Head-quarters Staff at least had turned out *en masse* to give us kindly greeting, but no—merely the Customs, in most unaccustomed guise.

Kenneth went ashore with our visitors to take our passports to be *viséd* afresh, and display the rifle permits, the while we made ready to leave the fleshpots for the cold, rough world outside.

After a farewell banquet our host saw us off from his yacht and from Batoum station, to which we drove by a roundabout route so that we might, although it was almost dark, get some idea of the extent of the city.

The first thing Russian town-planners set about is the contriving of a popular walk where the inhabitants may parade among bits of waste paper, fruit peelings,

and wreckage reminiscent of a bygone Bank Holiday at home, and this is inevitably christened the Alexandrovsky Sad (Alexander Garden), or perhaps the Gorodsky Sad (Town Garden). Very often the "sad" part of the affair most fits the result, but the boulevard at Batoum, lined by a glory of tropical vegetation, with the glittering shimmer of the blue Euxine stretching away to meet a bluer sky, glows with an atmosphere and colour impossible to describe. Your eyes rest on the witching scene, and—the East's a-calling!

Batoum station absolutely reeked of petroleum,—kerosine as Russians always call it. The reason for the overwhelming odour was not far to seek. Huge grey cylindrical casks, like vast iron boilers, from Baku, "the City of the Winds," lay ready for further journeying, and on a siding a whole train-load of them had just arrived.

Quantities of oil are also brought from the distant fields by a pipe line, after which it is cased for export, or tanked straight away on the steamers, whose fuel it is also.

We had a most amusing time trying to secure tickets and arrange excess luggage charges on our kit. The Russian which Kenneth and Cecily had bragged so much about was decidedly rusty, and the clerk-in-charge took a seat at last and gave himself up to conning a portly tome of international expressions. A tall Caucasian came to our rescue eventually, asking us in French what he could do to help us. This good Samaritan was bound for Tiflis also. We need fear nothing.

Railway communication between Batoum and Tiflis is very good, if slightly infrequent. There are two trains in the twenty-four hours—we left Batoum at 9.44 p.m.—and the journey takes thirteen hours or so to accomplish. The appearance of the outside of the train is misleading, for the accommodation is good, and, first-class at least, quite clean. A couple of squat little engines, with two funnels each, driven by petroleum, dragged us along.

Our Samaritan friend joined us at a midnight supper party contrived from our stores and tea-basket. He was a fine upstanding stalwart of about forty years of age, Hebraic-looking, and comely enough in his way. When anyone made a remark he turned his eye with eagle keenness on the speaker, his face alert with interest. Among his own people I daresay he was rated as a handsome man, but our English insularity overlooked his type, and we merely dismissed his claims with the comprehensive “does not come up to our ideal,” serenely indifferent to the fact that these much-trotted-out ideals of ours have not even the advantage of originality. The whole lot of them, impeters of progress very often, are merely legacies, bequeathed to us from precedent and family tradition.

Our new acquaintance revealed himself presently as the scion of a Karbardan family, all apparently tutelary hereditary princes. Cecily always maintains that she can tell at a glance by the look of a man what he does and how he does it. She was floored here, for national dress is a great leveller, and it is only by the “trimmings”—if I may call the silver embellishments

worn by the Caucasian upper classes so—that a tyro can differentiate between the various ranks at all.

The Tscherkess dress—Tscherkess is the Russian name for the Adighé or Circassian tribe—has become the general costume all over the Caucasus, and where you don't get the exact thing you find adaptations. The Russians wear it themselves and have bestowed it on the Cossacks. The main feature of the kit is the tscherkesska, a long collarless coat, cut V-shape from neck to waist, where it is secured by hooks and eyes. It is usually fashioned from a strong good woollen cloth of one colour. Next comes the beschmet, a sort of secondary robe-coat, equally long, made with a high straight collar-band, and hooked to the waist. This garment is of thinner stuff, cotton perhaps, or a mixture of silk and cotton. With your real dandy the parts which show, such as the open V-piece, the turning-back portions of the sleeves—both these coats have immensely long sleeves—and the collar-band, are of silk, often handsomely embroidered. The tscherkesska has no pockets, merely slits, through which the capacious hold-alls provided in the beschmet may be reached.

Beneath all this impedimenta—if you are an investigator, and would fathom everything—come what is usually described as “tight, evenly-fitting trousers of a dark material.” But the tightness and evenness of fit are so rarely there that they may be dismissed as an ideal hardly ever realized. In fact, all the Caucasian trousers I saw resemble more than anything the shapeless trouser-knickerbockers which I call “Windermere

particulars," weird sartorial arrangements worn by all the "bloods" of the Lakeland village, and evolved, I fancy, by some old nurse from a favourite "first pair." The result—a vast one—has transcended all ideas of magical artistry, and it has become impossible to tell from the cut of the things whether the wearer is coming or going.

Am I writing a book on the Caucasus or on trousers? Well, both! You must not chide me, or expect me to keep to the gist of things for long. Did you ever know a woman who could stick to the point?

Gaiters of leather, soft or hard, hard mostly, like many things in this flinty world, are usually worn, and, just covering the gaiter edge, a comfortable shoe, like a moccasin, which the poorer classes stuff with grass beneath the sole, for warmth and ease.

Hats are of the most varied description, but the papak, or fur cap, made in all sorts of shapes, sizes, heights, and materials, predominates. The specimen worn by our Prince was of reasonable dimensions, close-fitting, of very black Astrakhan, or Bokhara skin, as it is always described in the East.

Most tscherkesskas have the arsenal of pockets for cartridges across the breast, seven or eight a side, and the diagonal rows worn by our companion were filled with little wooden cylinders, highly ornamented about the tops with silver.

"Princes have but titles for their glories," said the Bard, but he had not seen the Karbardan Beau Brummell, at whose waist, straight down in front, hung a long poniard, elaborately sheathed in silver. A

second dagger, longer still, hung from his side, suspended from a beautifully wrought belt. Epaulettes he wore also, stiff, solid-looking silver ones.

A red dawn broke on a sparsely populated landscape, with no agricultural areas of any magnitude. Sometimes in a really ugly vista a little peep of Paradise vouchsafed itself, as though to encourage us. A distant peak, a green copse, the wavering Kura River, the gold of a sunflower field, or the lesser glint of maize. Flocks of quail rose as the train disturbed them, gorged little birds—so fat they could hardly fly at all—who lolloped back into the Lucullus banquet in sated heaviness.

We climbed up the Suram mountain, the watershed which divides the comparatively temperate zone of the Rion River from that of the Kura, with its climatic extremes, and down again, in an astonishing drop, to Suram itself. In the early morning hours we reached Gori, a little town lying on a plain at the base of a rock, rising to a height of perhaps two hundred feet. Here all the passengers, save ourselves and the Prince, who breakfasted with us, stampeded to the refreshment-room, or to waiting buffets on the platform, and drank tea from little glasses set in a handled arrangement, and ate lengthy cucumbers dipped in sugar, inch by inch. Cucumbers at six o'clock in the morning!

From Gori the line wound through miles of glens, narrowing in places to the very windows of the train. Thence from these green valleys, through rocky defiles to a country cut by precipices, rolling far, far below

us to the plains. Presently we emerged on the old town of Mtsket, sentinel to the Kura valley.

The muddy reaches of the river came in view again, "a considerable stream," as the American said of his Niagara. A boom of logs floated past us, but the loggers did not come down the river on the shining boles, as is the custom in America, but prodded and pushed the massive stems into rushing channels by means of hooked poles from the shore. They were dressed like our Prince—these log steerers—save for the silver adornments. Their huge hats were of the ubiquitous sheepskin, very long in the fur. Later I discovered the advantages of the colossal proportions of the popular headgear. It is a veritable portmanteau to its wearer, and in its vasty recesses a traveller often carries his entire *nécessaire de voyage*.

CHAPTER III

CAUCASIA AND ITS PEOPLES

As I travell'd hither through the land
I find the people strangely fantasied.
King John.

A great feast of languages.
Love's Labour's Lost.

IN the days of my youth a map of the Caucasus was suddenly required of me, and I remember painstakingly filling in an oasis of white paper with a sort of herring-bone arrangement, which represented, to my mind at least, a continuous mountain chain stretching from sea to sea. Here, on the peaks of the mighty range, my fancy established the romantic race of people whom my governess, a lady with "views" on pronunciation, called "Circazshons," whose women, beautiful houris, lived in a chronic state of being clapped into harems by the hated Turk; whose men spent all their days in valiant struggles to get them out again.

The geographical and topographical side of the Caucasus has been so systematically "done" by various writers that it seems almost a *reductio ad absurdum* for a casual farer like myself to dip into orography at all, but for the benefit of those who rarely tackle important works on exploration and ethnology,

I feel I must erect a little scaffolding whereon to nail a few wandering facts, otherwise the exact whereabouts of our hunting grounds will be "wropt" in mystery.

My vague childish ideas were not so very "out" after all, as regards the geographical side of the country, for though my herring-bone was too continuously solid, too persistently uniform, the great Caucasian rampart is a chain of lofty linked heights, divided into three sections, of which the central range is the most magnificent. Here are many summits rising above 15,000 feet, and myriad lesser peaks with pinnacled tops lying in the zone of everlasting snow, on whose contorted sides the iridescent glaciers stream in seas of ice.

Of this central portion Mr. Freshfield, in his *Exploration of the Caucasus*, says: "It consists of a number of short parallel, or horse-shoe ridges, crowned with lofty peaks, and enclosing basins filled by the névés of great glaciers."

The best known of the ice-crowned Titans is, of course, Elbruz, 18,470 feet, ascended for the first time by Mr. Freshfield in 1868. The average non-mountaineering Briton has the haziest of notions regarding all the rest of the Caucasian peaks, save, perhaps, romantic Kasbek, Koshtantau, and Dykhtau.

Eastward of the central mass curves a mountainous region of lesser importance, though in this secondary section are to be counted many summits exceeding 13,000 feet, and one, the volcanic Basarjusi, which touches 14,722 feet. This mountain checks the eastward line of elevation, and from thence to the Caspian

coast the declivities sink in exhausted effort, until, with a final spurt at maintaining a barrier, the cliffs fall precipitously into the sea.

Far away to the westward in its third section, on the coast of the Black Sea, the mountain chain lies low. A group of tree-clothed hills undulates from Taman, on the Azov, to Gagri, where the elevation increases, and from the vicinity of Soukoum-Kaleh until it links up with the central group the rampart of majestic heights maintains a persistent altitude which never sinks below 8000 feet, and often rises far above.

The greatest width of the region, about 120 miles, is attained in Daghestan, "the mountain land," a sombre, unsmiling country of deep gorges and sharp slopes, which lies between an encircling spur dominated by many fine glacier-bearing peaks, thrown off from the main chain.

The greatest length of the Caucasus from end to end, taking it from Taman on the Azov to Apsheron, a peninsula on the Caspian, is usually given as eight hundred miles, but only half this length is precipitously mountainous. Geographers quibble furiously together as to exact measurements; of course they wouldn't be real geographers if they didn't. Like historians they exist mainly for the smashing of theories. Anything between six hundred and eight hundred miles will do very well for unknowledgable you and me.

No two etymologists can agree as to the precise signification of the name "Caucasus" either. Certain it is that for many centuries the word was applied to the range alone, and now the designation is bestowed

on the whole of the vast territory rolling away from the Don province to the far-flung frontier lines of Persia and Turkey.

Nature has not, for some good purpose of her own, provided many easy ways across the Caucasus, and there are but two passes officially scheduled for all-the-year-round wheel traffic—the Krestovaya Gora, or Cross Pass, 7973 feet, on the Great Military Road which connects Tiflis with Vladikavkaz, and, going westward, the Mamison, 9284 feet, which links Mingrelia and the north. Westward again, above Soukoum-Kaleh, is the Klukhor Pass, a binding thread 'twixt Cis-Caucasia and Kutais, the Cyta in Colchis of Jason's day. But the Klukhor has limitations, for during many weeks in the year it is wholly impassable, and the time is not yet when it may be ranked with the Krestovaya and Mamison passes.

Over the main chain the horseman and "foot-slogger" find some negotiable tracks. Eastward of the Mamison are numerous horse trails, westward only glacier passes, over some of which it is possible, at certain seasons, to drive cattle.

Through all the early ages the Caucasian chain formed an unclimbable rampart between the northern nomadic peoples and the many races domiciled in the valleys of the south.

Pompey, after crushing the Mediterranean pirates, sailed his war-galleys up the Euxine, led his legions against the Mithridatic forces and defeated the Iberians near Mtsket, but never passed the foot of the central range. Centuries afterwards, Justinian bivouacked

above Suram. Still the strong chain held taut. No army crossed it.

Æons before Christianity dawned on the world, adventurous Greek merchants, probably from the colonies on the Black Sea, or Pontic, coast, explored the marshes of the Phasis, now called the Rion, and followed the river to its source. They came back to tell of rivers running gold, rivers wherein the natives laid sheepskins in which to enmesh the precious metal as it came down stream with the cataracts ; of fertile valleys where grapes and peaches grew wild ; of prolific orchards and rich mineral lands, an Eldorado, the Ultima Thule of dreams.

Instantly the strongest principle of the Grecian nature, imagination, created a new and necromantic world. That fecundity of fancy which adorned all it touched, and draped every occurrence with high fantastical illusions, peopled the Caucasian solitudes with glorious shapes. Up the ancient Phasis Jason sailed the Argo to gain the Golden Fleece, and in Colchis ploughed his acres in the Field of Mars. In the caves and gorges of the vast unexplored peaks fire-breathing griffins dwelt, and one-eyed Arimaspians waged eternal war together. To the Caucasus journeyed Hercules to wrest the magic belt from Queen Hippolyte, the girdle whose witching power made the Amazons, who lived in Daghestan, such redoubtable foes. Over the endless northern steppes poor tortured Io wandered, beset by Juno's gadfly.

Æschylus, the most sublime of Greece's tragic poets, laid the foundation stone of this beautiful imagery.

The great dramatist placed the chained Prometheus on a rocky height above the sea, with the scream of the gulls and the murmuring pity of the water-nymphs in his ears, but later legend contributed a fabric, and immortalized as the scene of the tragedy the black eastern face of Kasbek, far from the sound of breaking waves, save those of the foaming Terek River.

It may be that these exquisite fancies and superstitions communicated themselves in dim remote fashion to the infant intelligence of the varied tribes, but certain it is that many of these primitive peoples of the Caucasus are singularly imaginative. Not theirs the dullness of the Russian peasant. Instead, a quick alert fancy, stored with poetical illusions, weird dreams, and necromantic visions.

Superstition is the death of freedom, and yet it is the free man, the dweller in the solitudes and silences of the world, who is most superstitious. Living ever in touch with the unknown infinite, each compassing force of Nature, the winds and the rains, the deep untried realms of the night, kindles an unfathomable romanticism, lights a flame that is never dim.

And now something about a few of the much-written-of different peoples who make the region a vast ethnological museum, in which may be found specimens of races dating back to the dawn of history, countless tribes whose variety has no end, whose affinity hardly any beginning.

Pliny, quoting Timosthenes, tells of three hundred distinct languages which were spoken in ancient Colchis, and adds that the Romans enlisted the services

of one hundred and thirty interpreters to conduct affairs. Herodotus, the father of all history, shows us that in his day the frosty Caucasus columned a land of many tribes. "It contains," he wrote, "many and various nations, living mostly on the fruits of wild trees."

Strabo, in a later age, mentioned seventy distinct races, all speaking different languages, who might be met with in Diossyreas, the Soukoum-Kaleh of to-day, and described the fierce and warlike Soans, the Suane-tians of our own time. He wrote, too, of the poisoned arrows and the skin shoes, spiked beneath the soles, which enabled the savage wearers to negotiate the glaciers and passes, and told us of the troglodytes who dwelt in excavated holes.

These subterranean dwellings, dating from the age of savagery, are to be found in many parts of the Caucasus. Here and there, as at Gori, the cliff tunnells display a keen sense of the beautiful. But for the most part the typical troglodyte home is a roughly hewn den.

The Georgian race, descendants of the ancient Iberians, are still, as they ever were, the aristocrats of the Caucasus, and until the Russian occupation held the dominant place. The more one studies them the more one is imbued with the certainty that this people of mysterious antecedents, this race, older, ethnologists declare, than the Egyptian, stands on an entirely different plane of civilization and understanding from any other dotted about the Caucasus. Their Golden Age was in the twelfth century, during

the reign of Queen Tamara, whose fame is immortal.

The Georgian race was converted to Christianity in the fourth century A.D. Previous to that era legendary lore describes them as worshippers of the sun and moon. Since their adoption of the Christian faith they have never lapsed into heterodoxy, and ever held out against the specious persuadings of their sometime suzerains the Persians. The "True Believer" will scornfully tell you that the religious staunchness of the Georgians has more than a little to do with a love of "Little Mary." The Mahommedans, of course, interdict pork, and the Georgians are very fond of it.

It is a joke with the Russians that every man in the paramount tribe, be his occupation what it may, is a prince, and certainly the title is amazingly common; but it is so in all parts of the country. Quite what constitutes the right to inclusion in the noble army of princelets I cannot say. With the Tatars it is the proud possession of so many head of cattle. As there are colonels and colonels, judges and judges in the United States, so are there princes and princes in Georgia. Some of the noblest examples have pedigrees which put out of court those of the myriad people in England whose ancestors came over in that densely crowded ship with William the Conqueror.

There will be no more kings of Georgia, but they have a kingdom still, the priceless one of intellectuality. They are sincere lovers of poetry, hero worshippers, too, but poetry lovers first, and if it can be a pæan of praise so much the better. It was a great surprise to find—

and just why I was surprised I cannot tell you—how wide a knowledge of the great poets the average cultivated Georgian possesses. Prose has nothing like the same attraction. In the National Theatre Shakespeare is sometimes played, the work of the Master having been translated by Prince Machabeli.

One very intellectual man I met, a prince, *cela va sans dire*, who had been educated in France, had an extensive acquaintance with the word songs of the whole world. I don't know that his choice and judgment would have been approved by our critical critics, but they were very interesting to me. His favourites were all of the heroic mould. For instance, he placed Joaquin Miller above all America's poets, and maintained stoutly that "Columbus" ranks as the finest poem ever written by an American.

The national epic of the Georgians was composed by their poet Rustaveli in the twelfth century. It is called Vepkhvis Tkaosani, The Man in the Panther's Skin, and is to-day as familiar to the whole Georgian nation as the words of God Save the King are with us, and that is very familiar indeed. This impassioned poem sets forth the history of one Avtandil, a hero who stands, like Tennyson's King Arthur, as representative of the poet's ideal national type. Some of the lines of the famous epic have passed into proverbial sayings, which are quoted as we quote our own Immortal One. I like best the last stanza, in which it would seem that the poet foresaw, as in a glass, darkly, the fate in store for his beloved land:—

“Their deeds are ended, like a dream of night,
With them their golden age has ended too.”

Fifty years ago national patriotism among the Georgians was not the fetish it is to-day. “Georgia is a light-hearted slave,” wrote Dumas père, “gay even in servitude.” *Nous avons changé tout cela!* As no person or nation can be happy without a grievance, Georgia has found one in the fact that the once-welcome Russian is there at all. Newspapers, published in Georgian, foster old traditions, reformers and preachers encourage the gradual drawing away from Russianizing influences. A virile literature has sprung up, a school of romanticism and historical heroics, inspired by the celebrated Prince Ilia Tchavtchavadye, orator, poet, patriot, politician, who was assassinated at Tiflis in 1907. To-day the greatest lyricist of the Georgian race is Akaki Tséréтели, another prince, and a prince of poets.

Amid the sierras of the central highlands of the Caucasian chain lies Ossetia, the territory of a tribe now highly civilized as regards its better classes, many of whom hold high positions in the civil and military service of Russia. The Muscovite name for their one-time vigorous opponents is “Gentlemen of the Mountains.”

Busy Queen Thamara, whose second husband was an Ossete, converted the tribe to Christianity, but the converted ones are backsliders to-day, and the majority profess Mahommedanism, whilst many are frankly pagan.

Professor Kovalevsky has given us a fine descrip-

tion of the old-time Ossete customs, of their slave deals, their blood feuds, their Feasts of the Dead, of which there are seven ; of their sacred groves, and the slain heroes who resuscitate themselves in order to fight the battles of their descendants.

There is a tradition prevalent in the Caucasus that the Ossetes and the Khevsurs, who wear chain mail and helmets, are of Crusader stock, though why the Crusaders crusaded so far away from the Holy Land history sayeth not. The Ossetes are considered by ethnologists to be of undoubted Aryan extraction, and the language spoken by the tribe is affiliated to the Medo-Persian.

Eastward of Ossetia are many small tribes, too numerous and complicated for a slight mention. Among them are the Ingouch, Touché, and Karaboulaks, who all at one time formed a part of the vast Tchettchetz host, but on the adoption by the latter of a loose form of Mahommedanism, the Ingouch threw off intertribal amenities, and remained in a condition of heathenism, whose ancient rites and usages are said by historians to be older than Druidism. The majority of the Ingouch have no idea of a Supreme Being, see their gods in strange rocks, which they call yerdas, and periodically worship, and find their sermons in, shapeless silver *lares et penates*, to which uncarven meaningless treasures they make propitiatory sacrifices.

Beyond the lands of the Mahommedan Tchettchetz, a very large, subdivided tribe, is Daghestan, a mountain region containing many offshoots from the splendid dominant races whose support enabled Schamyl to

maintain his long religious war against the Russians. Schamyl himself, though always referred to as a Lesghian, as the inhabitants of Southern Daghestan are collectively denominated, was an Avar, a branch tribe, from whose ranks the greatest men of Daghestan have sprung. All these mountain men are devout Mahommedans, and make pilgrimages to Mecca. Big, powerful creatures, of a pronounced Mongol type, they are most industrious workers at their many manufactures. The blades forged in Daghestan are renowned through the whole country, carpet-making, armoury of all kinds, silver work, and making the cloth for the universally worn bourkas employ large numbers of the keen-witted tribesmen of this wild highland corner of the Caucasus.

Near Pjatigorsk, the health resort of all health resorts, is Karbarda, the home of a fine manly tribe allied to the Adighé. Many Karbardan aristocrats are to be found in the military service of Russia, whose friend Karbarda has ever been.

In a wonderland, amidst the wooded valleys of the Upper Ingur, live the Suanetians, the Soans of Strabo's day, probably, unless we include the Ingouch, the only tribe existing in the same conditions of primitive environment which surrounded them a thousand years ago. "The age is always the same," Goethe said; "the only difference being the master minds that control it." The trend of civilization has passed Suanetia by, and the master-minds of her controlling chieftains are no more advanced than the master-minds of long ago. The religion practised is a sort of

sustained paganism, punctuated by dashes of diluted Christianity. Their principal deities are Mountain Spirits, dryads of the woods, the great Queen Tamara, and St. George. Of their blood-feuds and wild inexplicable ways a student may glean much from Mr. Freshfield's incomparable *Exploration of the Caucasus*.

Jason's Field of Mars is now Mingrelian territory, but the lazily-inclined tribesmen do not worry themselves to plough the famous furrows o'er again. The Mingrelian is looked on in the Caucasus much in the same light that an American regards his brother hailing from Missouri State. Perhaps you know the "What did you expect" tone of the explanatory, "Oh, he's from Missouri!" It is all there when a Russian speaks of a Mingrelian. The Muscovite will tell you, if you ask him, that he scorns the Mingrelian for his indolent habits, forgetting that the warm mugginess of the tropical swamp lands would sap the activity of the most energetic.

To the west of the land of the despised ones lies Imeretia, another tropical corner, with a variation of the most bitter winters. First cousins to the Georgians, the Imeretians, speaking the same tongue.

Some of the myriad dialects of the Caucasus have affinity with each other, the basis being old Georgian, but the majority are individual and distinct, having been orally handed down through the centuries, bound by no literary or written conventions. The Avarians of Daghestan are said by chroniclers to possess a written language, the original import of which is specified in Persian characters.

M. de Chantre, in his monumental *Recherches Anthropologiques dans la Caucase*, has a most beautiful explanation of the impossibilities of reducing to mere writing the intricacies of the Circassian tongue. He tells us an old Adighé scholar set about compiling a comprehensive guide to his unwritten language, which was to be a linguistic encyclopædia for all time. As his pen hovered over the paper he was brought up by an arresting Presence. "Give up your task," advised the majestic intruder. "Can you put into human writing the rolling of the thunder among the peaks, the crash of the falling avalanche, the deep roar of the mountain torrents, the blast of the waterfalls? Can you represent the sound of the stones as they clatter down the gorges, of the branches of the forest as they moan in the tempest, the screams and songs of the birds as they call to one another from height to height? How then can you hope to imprison in letters the free speech of the tribes of the Caucasus?"

Presumably, after this poetical admonition, the *savant* desisted from his self-imposed task. Certain it is he left us no vocabulary.

Of the Abkhas and Circassians I have already spoken. "Tscherkess," which is the Russian name for the latter tribe, has now become the equivalent of "Thief! Cut-throat! Waster!" No Circassian ever terms himself Tscherkess. If you want to provoke a quarrel—try it!

In the region of the Upper Aragva live the Khevsurs and Pshavs, offshoots from the Georgian race. Both tribes consider themselves Christian, although pos-

sessing many pronounced Mahommedan traits. They shave their heads, are polygamists, and, *à la* Moslem, won't touch pork.

The Khevsurs—Khevi, from which their name is derived, is a Georgian word, and means “valley”—still believe in the most mysterious deities, all very poetical and fantastical; gods of the East and West, a god of gods, a little god, an oak tree god, a wind spirit, and a thunder controller.

Scattered everywhere we find the Tatar. The exact genealogy of these people ethnologists are puzzled to define, but they are undoubtedly of Turkish extraction. All are Mahommedans, and a hard-working race of carriers and traders, speaking a dialect of Turkish, which is very generally spoken throughout the Caucasus. The lower-class Russian has a befogging habit of describing all Moslems indiscriminately as Tatars.

The one relaxation of the Tatar tribes, that of brigandage, is passing from them. Civilization has driven the highwayman far afield, and he no longer waits for you in the great waste places outside Tiflis. To the very confines of the Tsar's provinces the gallant has receded. Very soon he will overbalance, and, falling into Persia or Turkey, be lost to sight. R.I.P. He was “such a merry, nimble, stirring spirit.”

The Cossack hordes—Russia's pioneers—have occupied the northern frontiers of the mountains since the reign of Peter the Great. The far northern steppes are occupied by the Nogais, Tatarized Mongolians. The Kalmucks, a tribe of Mongolian descent, are to be met

with in Astrakhan, which borders on the Caucasian northern frontier.

The nomadic Kurdish tribes wander after the grass in the region of the Ararats and Alägoz. Armenians are peculiar now to no particular district, but still have their greatest stronghold in the district of Erivan. There you see the simple peasant ; his brother of the wily trading instincts, the persevering monopolist, you must look for in the towns.

For the first time in all history these peoples are ruled by one Power, for although many conquerors have claimed through the ages absolute suzerainty over the whole Caucasian region and the adjacent steppes, the control exercised, particularly as regards the independent mountain tribes, existed largely in the fond imaginations of the *pro tem.* nominal " Government."

When Russia occupied the country in 1801 Batoum and Kars belonged to Turkey, the eastern provinces to Persia, whilst Georgia, Mingrelia, and Imeretia represented a single State which had been in existence with a consecutive history from the dawn of the Christian era.

CHAPTER IV

TIFLIS AND ITS INHABITANTS

I'll view the manners of the town,
Peruse the traders, gaze upon the buildings,
And then return, and sleep within mine inn.
Comedy of Errors.

Would he not be a comfort to our travel?
As You Like It.

New servant, welcome.
Two Gentlemen of Verona.

PICTURESQUE Tiflis, surrounded by an amphitheatre of barren, drab hills, lies on both sides of the swiftly rushing Kura river, and from the steep banks are flung connecting bridges which link together the several quarters into which the city is divided.

Our hotel was situated in the Erivansky Ploshad, or Square, a most lively centre, right in the heart of things, amid a variety of European shops, and not very far from the palace in the Golovinsky Prospekt, with its beautifully laid out gardens, of the Viceroy (Namiestnik) of the Caucasus. The longish drive from the station rather caused us to question the reputation Russians give themselves for superior road-making. The little phaeton, pneumatic-tyred, with two long-tailed ponies going *ventre-à-terre*, bumped about like a coracle in a storm. It was not exactly an ideal con-

veyance, lacking the saving grace of polish and cleanliness. But—what have I to do with idyllic carriages? I, who keep nothing more pretentious than a wheelbarrow. And did not Schiller tell us that—“No man should measure by a scale of perfection the meagre product of reality.” I expect he meant “woman,” also.

We lurched past some really beautiful turn-outs as we raced down the hill. Such a medley of conveyances! Carriages of Hyde Park variety, splendidly horsed, trotted past lethargic buffaloes drawing primitive native carts, made up of a mystery of tangled baulks tied together with knotted ropes, clattering wooden wheels, and a general air of abandon which called for the pencil of a Lawson Wood.

Imperturbable donkeys, moving beneath vast loads of charcoal, scarce made way for a great automobile—a pioneer, from the excitement it created—autocratically “Teuf-teufing” behind. A quartet of two-humped Bactrian camels, stately and aloof, carried mountainous burdens of bright-hued carpets, and behind, a little apart, as though to emphasize class difference, strode a majestic dromedary like a ship in full sail, loaded to the gunwale with embroidered cushions.

Down the centre of the wide roadway came the quaintest figure imaginable, a jester in motley, Touchstone to the whole. A little black tent, with a waving red pennon at its apex, trotted along on four slender legs, and as the perambulating structure neared us we saw that it disguised a Tatar, mounted on a donkey,



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wrapped about in the indispensable bourka, though Tiflis in summer is not, one would think, quite the moment for the wearing of it!

The good Caucasian loves his bourka—said to be the chlamys of the ancients—above all his possessions. It is a large cloak-like arrangement, and being enormously thick and of a felt texture, though light for its size, is waterproof to a surprising extent. A good one costs about thirty roubles, or roughly, three guineas. Now and again in mountain regions you see a white bourka, but the majority are very black and rough-surfaced.

To the native his bourka is often tent, bedding, all; wrapped in one he defies the weather, and even holds at bay the predatory domestic chamois of the Caucasian post-houses, the most voracious and energetic insects in the world.

Our hotel was extraordinarily civilized. I don't quite know what we expected, but anyone who has studied the subject of hotels in Southern Russia may apprehend anything.

Among the medley of nations staying in the *auberge* there was only one other Brit^{ish}er, but he counted for a good many. He was a well-known publisher from London Town, suffering from conversational over-pressure, and he converted us into safety-valves. His object in visiting the Caucasus was to discover if the real thing was anything like a "Colour-book" he had recently brought out. So far he hadn't recognized a single salient feature. He said that there is no possible doubt but that the

modern "colour-book," done in the three, four, or five colour process—or was it ply? I forget—reproduces scenery to much greater advantage than scenery produces itself. Speaking personally, he far preferred the colour-book.

The feminine element consisted of some light-hearted Greeks, an Armenian or two, and a stolid German Frau, who had come out from the Fatherland to be married, *en seconde nocces*. The husband-elect was a good Swabian in "the" Colony of Tiflis, so benevolent, as Douglas Jerrold said, "he would have held an umbrella over a duck in a shower," and so eminently thriving as to give no encouragement to the doubts and qualms which assailed his ladye, who was by now not at all sure that she had selected a mate really worthy of her. She was quite certain that her lofty character, keen intelligence, knowledge of housewifery, and all-round capabilities entitled her to "the pick of the husbands of the world."

Not other people's, of course. I suppose she meant the husband genus.

For a person supplied with such an unusual store of common sense, her grip on one of the greatest truths in a woman's life was very slack. She didn't seem to realize one bit that the widow who marries a second time does not deserve to be one.

Tiflis is a trio of three distinct towns. The Russian, lying on the south-west bank of the Kura, where the fashionable world, the great officials, and the Armenian money-lenders live, where also you find the best hotels, fine shops, and electrically-lighted and tree-planted

streets ; old Tiflis, going eastward from the Muscovite centre, tucked away in a hollow ; and, linked to the Russianized town by a fine bridge, the German quarter, where live the descendants of the Würtemberg emigrants who accepted Russian hospitality some ninety years ago. Here they flourish, in stolid Swabian fashion, happy exiles in a community with whom they have nothing in common. Bordering their tree-lined principal street are the beer-gardens. Everything is German, language, shops, schools, people. Somehow or other, you have stepped into Hans Andersen's Magic Trunk, and, opening the lid, peep out on Tübingen.

Does everyone feel the mysterious allurements of an untracked town ? Unexplored cities have an irresistible fascination for me. It is, I think, the cobwebby remnants of childhood's days clinging about one still. Memory is harking back to those fairy valleys and make-believes, which were for all of us.

Russian Tiflis is like many another European town, but old Tiflis is like nothing on earth but itself. The narrow streets and overhanging balconies were made for Caucasian Romeos and Juliets. Only there are no flowers. Plenty of colour, but no flowers.

We make for the Tatar Bazaar first, to the tortuous winding lanes where the airless air hangs heavy with the potent smell of the East. The congested ways would not pass muster with a sanitary engineer ! We should have to remind him that it is easier for a native to rid himself of caste than of ingrained habits of insanitation. And the winter frost rids this country of most of its ills.

Each street, the narrowest of narrow lanes really, has its own speciality. The shops are not jumbled up heterogeneously as with us. Go down each unpaved alley, and you know just what to expect. The vegetable street provides only vegetables, that opening strewn with garbage leads to the furriers', that to the shoemakers' special section, and this uneven gully takes us to the one of all for us—the silversmiths'. We need courage to go down it! A foreign excursionist is hailed with the abandon of joy and delight which greets the first American visitor of summer in the Lake District of England, with the consequent rise of prices all round.

No sun shines here, and overhanging houses, built largely of wood, hide the light of day. From alcoved balconies above veiled houris peep down on us. At least, they are houris whilst they remain veiled, and just peep!

The scene is that of the old-time setting of a pantomime harlequinade, if you can remember when children were young enough to appreciate the now obsolete foolery. Every low doorway seemed just the one for the clown to rush from, thrusting yards of stolen sausage into his capacious pockets as he ran; each window frame, innocent of glass, waited for the lithe, silver figure of harlequin. But for the dainty shoes of Columbine there was no resting-place. A Columbine in American gum-boots would not do at all, and nothing else would keep out the sea of dust, which after a rain-storm churns into banks of brown foam at the street corners, through which the mules, with



A STREET IN OLD TIFLIS

bells a-jangle, wade knee-deep, and camels with disdainful heads level with the roofs, moving silently as grey wraiths, sink in philosophic calm.

Here is a medley of nations, and the tongue of every land. The familiar "Salaam Aleikum" of a stately Arab answers the gay "Bon Jour" of a smiling Frenchman, our awkward "How-do-you-do?" replied to the dull "Gutenmorgen" of a ponderous German. Georgians, Mingrelians, wild mountaineers from Daghestan, in massive sheepskin papaks and ragged tscherkesskas, Tatar shepherds, and Tatar traders in blue cotton tunics and white skull caps, Persians, long-haired Russian priests in cassocks of rusty purple and with conspicuous rosaries, graceful Arabs, with the lithe swinging walk which tells of the desert and the great silences, smartly uniformed Russians, stolid Armenians, and strange primitive people to whom I could give no name. We were rubbing shoulders with the remote centuries, and felt the subtle charm of antiquity charged with the vital force of a gripping modernism.

Down an obscure labyrinthine alley an unhooded goshawk sat leashed to a padded perch, shaped like a music-stool in miniature. Kenneth, who is a keen falconer, made a straight line for this attraction, and conducted a conversation by means of signs with a Persian, who drowsed in the dust alongside his bird. Numbers of little Tatar children danced in the narrow way to the strains of a barrel-organ, and as they peacocked by in a cake-walk of their own invention, the beautiful bird cringed low to its perch as though in deadly fear. Bold as brass with its owner, and even

with my cousin, it was thrown into a panic by the proximity of so many small people. Indian falconers always say that hawks stand in hereditary awe of children, because they mistake them for their enemies of the jungle, the monkey tribe! The error, in this case, was really almost justifiable.

The Persian population of Tiflis is a very large one. Many are thriving merchants, descendants, perhaps, of the one-time Iranian rulers, who preside over cave-like dark rooms where you may see in shaded perfection the glorious glow of carpets from Tavriz and Khorassan, Shemakha and Kurdistan, or handle lumps of turquoise shot with the greeny-blue effects of a William Morris.

The saddlers are mostly Persians, too, and the craftsmen ply their trade in the open doors, which enables you to see Caucasian leather-work in every stage of transition. Bits of horse jewellery hang on pegs around the dirty little shops, stirrups which out-stirrup any ever invented, and saddles, from the prehistoric example to ornate specimens adorned with bosses of silver and tooled red leather.

Everywhere the wrought and inlaid silver-work of the country attracts the roving eye. Every Caucasian wears a kinjal at his waist, and the beautiful scabbard in which the better-class native sheathes his weapon displays the art of the metal manipulator at his best. Often the dagger hangs from a belt of Orion-like splendour, traced and deeply cut into designs of extraordinary grace and freedom of line.

We were inveigled into a tiny shop by the attractions

of a most alluring kinjal, and commenced a protracted haggle over its price with an old Armenian, whose cunning eyes, always the same and yet ever changing, kept glancing at his Familiar, a tawny Persian—whose moustache and beard were dyed to the music-hall comedian shade of red—as though for encouragement to doughtier deeds in the way of extortion.

Cecily, picking her words, for her Russian seemed to grow rustier, bargained Scotch-fashion for three-quarters of an hour so successfully that, after a make-believe to quit the shop for ever, a proceeding which sent both Shylocks after us to the door, she stood possessed of an elaborate kinjal, in an inlaid sheath, and a handsome belt, for a quarter the price asked. Our Armenian extortioner seemed quite unable of his own volition to count the amount due him, and flew in frenzied haste to a rickety frame, the abacus of the Chinese, with wooden balls set on wires, and had a tremendous game with this contraption, knocking the bobbins about hither and thither. Then, as he got weary of it, with a far-away smile he announced that we owed him so much, exactly what we had made it out to be before the fun commenced. We paid the bill in rouble notes, notes so dirty and worn that we were almost glad to be rid of them.

Luxuries are expensive in Caucasia. Fruit is cheap enough and food generally ; the ubiquitous cucumber, most popular of eatables, may be had almost for the carrying away, but indulgences, the (what one of our generals in the late South African War, “ the Sybarite,” called) “ little comforts,” are heavily charged for, or

else it is that the transient Britisher is expected to keep up the traditional open-handedness of his nation. Some philosopher or other once observed that all things are dear in the Caucasus save human life. And though the barbers of Tiflis—I got this item from Kenneth!—no longer charge three roubles for a hair-cutting bout as in the days of Dumas, and you may now travel the land over in comparative safety, the words of the cynical observer have still a modicum of truth left in them.

The outstanding feature of the whole city is its militarism. A warlike atmosphere pervades everything. The very water-carriers walk with martial tread, and the cocks prisoned in long cylindrical baskets in the Caravanserai—a sort of general emporium—poor victims waiting to make a Roman holiday for someone, crow their requiem in clarion réveillé.

Almost every soul—that is the Russian method of taking the census—is in uniform. Here is a military community, if you like! A sight to gladden the heart of a Caucasian Mr. Blatchford.

“C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre!”
At least, not entirely. In the Caucasus, as in so many places, all is not gold that glisters. These swaggering warriors are often gilded deceptions, for no self-respecting citizen, be his occupation what it may, wears mufti. If you can't be a soldier, then try and look like one, seems the obsession of all and sundry. Under that martial cuirass and row of medals, won Heaven knows how, beats the gentle heart of a life saver. No slaughterer he, a local medico, at your

good service. That clanking sword, much too long for its little wearer, is every day put to the blush by the mightier pen of its overworked driver, a worthy telegraph clerk.

As for Kenneth, in a travel-worn tweed suit, nobody but the officials to whom he had letters of introduction believed him to be a soldier at all. A soldier out of uniform—impossible! And if Cecily and I had only had the forethought before leaving England to join that arrestingly-garbed corps of Ladies' Yeomanry, we might have made a *succès fou* of ourselves, instead of looking like a couple of brown wrens among a company of orioles.

The army of the Caucasus is, like the population of Tiflis, recruited from every nation. All's fish that comes to the Russian military net, provided that allegiance to the Tsar is sworn. The life stories of some of these warriors would be worth hearing, but—they are silent fellows, the world-spreading corps of the Might-Have-Beens.

In bygone times it was not accounted a high honour to belong to the forces of the Caucasian Province, which was used by the Russian military authority as a Land of Forgotten Things to which unwanted officers might be conveniently "stellenbosched."

To-day sees a very different state of affairs, and Caucasian billets are eagerly sought after; for whilst the private is not better paid than in other parts of Russia, the officer receives considerably more. The Army seems to be run, so far as an outsider can judge, on the most admirable self-supporting lines, with

what I should think is the least known expenditure of officer effort. Daily routine as we know it, everlasting parades, and morning perambulation of barracks for the smelling of meat, are simply *non sunt*.

Although the Caucasian Army stands free now of the "stellenbosch" aspersion, the country is used by Russia as a sort of half-way house to Siberia for unwanted politicals. They are marked men, these disturbing vital spirits, lonely and unwelcome in the better circles everywhere. I noticed, in the case of a keen-eyed, educated idler, necessity had been made into a virtue. He did not seem to require the society of his kind, did not shun it, rather he appeared to have forgotten them. I could not help but admire his silent acceptance of the position. One may admire the courage of absolute indifference to ostracism, but those who have this courage are seldom great men and never good ones.

Every Tiflisian—to coin a word—puts Amusement with a big "A" first, duty, with a small "d" next. Amusement is a fetish, an Ixion's wheel to which everyone is chained.

There is very little of the morning left by the time the educated Russian rises. He is, like the eagle-owls, most alert at night. About 9 p.m. he rubs his eyes and wakens up, previous to repairing to the clubs which are so important a feature in the Caucasian capital. They are not clubs, as we understand the word. The peaceful gloom of the ponderously furnished mausoleum, lightened up in drifts, the sense of museum-like stillness, which spells "club" to the Londoner,

is not the Tiflis notion of the thing at all. Ladies are not admitted on sufferance. They are encouraged, welcomed, desired. Bright lights greet them, there are cards and supper for those who would play and are hungry, and a gay orchestra for the dancers. How exquisitely they all dance, too! With a spontaneity of harmonious grace rare in England.

In the summer months the club system is conducted alfresco, in beautiful gardens, where the band plays into the small hours.

The fashionable Georgian ladies dress very well, and have the reputation of possessing great good looks. For established beauties they really are nice-looking, with what Du Maurier called "the ineffable forward shrug of a Clytie," but—such expressionless belles! Every casual observer is struck by the extraordinary lack of vivid life and spirit. Dumas pere's enthusiastic "*La Grèce, c'est Galatée encore marbre; la Géorgie, c'est Galatée devenue femme,*" is the idealist's way of putting the case.

The most entrancing waltz fails to rouse even passing animation. Their feet "like little mice steal in and out," their lithe bodies swing languorously to the music, but the immobile faces remain doll-like in passivity.

Mr. Ruskin said that the ideal girl should prefer dancing to walking and have at least six lovers. All the "fayre ladyes" of Georgia qualified for this standard. They danced because dancing to them is as natural as walking, and they had six lovers each because in the Caucasus there are enough men to go round and

a few over, very different from the chequered working overtime state of things existent in England.

The intense heat of summer drives most of the aristocratic residents of Tiflis to the numerous health resorts of the country, but just as it is with us when the newspapers tell us "London is empty," there were any number of people about. But, of course, July and August are not the time to form an opinion of local society. The notables do not return until late September; by November the season, with its unlimited gaieties, is in full swing.

This metropolis of Caucasia would have been a much less grilling spot in summer had the town planners of old time chosen a site a little farther up the Kura, a really ideal situation. I asked an Ossetian warrior the whys and wherefores of this palpable mistake, and he said that the city naturally would grow up about the hot sulphur springs, the springs now glorified into baths and run by the ubiquitous Armenians, who, like the Chinaman on the Pacific coast have "arrived" and no mistake about it. The Russians call the invaders "the Jews of the East," and have a frequently trotted-out saying to the effect that a Jew can out-bargain any two Russians, and an Armenian overreach the lot.

They are just everywhere, this most energetically pushing of peoples, who hold the trade of Transcaucasia in the hollow of their hands. The streets are full of them, dressed in European clothes, or an imitation of the cotton tunic of the Tatar, pad, pad, padding along, plantigrade fashion, on large flat feet.

Tiflis is said to contain more Armenians than any other city on earth save Constantinople, though the casual passer-by might be inclined to rank Manchester ahead of both. But—a big But—we cannot get past statistics.

The baths are in the Tatar quarter, and Kenneth, who sampled them, told us that you pay by the hour, and it is just as cheap for two people as one person—that is, if you get in together! Soap and towels are “extras.” The water was very hot, and, after being parboiled, the bather is expected to lie on a table whilst an animated Tatar dances a war-dance all over him.

The name Tiflis, pronounced Tiflees, accent on the “ees,” is derived from the Georgian word, Tbilisi, which means hot. Whether the comprehensive appellation refers to the intense heat of the ovenlike place in summer, to the warm sulphur baths, or to the character of what I will call the Soho areas is rather hard to determine. All three are of an equal torridity.

The amount of poor-class drinking shops in Tiflis almost outnumbers the myriad saloons in Butte City, U.S.A., surely the most thickly sprinkled town on earth. Here in these filthy cabaks, or duchans, the man in the street (I suppose this mysterious synonym finds his illustration in the Caucasus as elsewhere), drinks the native vodka, a bitter unsweetened gin, and a variety of beer which tastes like bad vinegar.

All the wine shops worthy of the name have the most grandiloquent titles, opulently eastern in tone. The patrons of “Rose of the World” kept us awake with the distant sound of revelry by night, and

“Heart’s Desire” ran a close second for popularity. Another cellar-hole, got at down earthen steps, had a long title emblazoned in blue letters across a rickety door, and this Cecily would only translate as “Bid me good-bye and go.”

The wines of the country are said to be very good, and Kenneth, who is one of those people who affect to “understand wine,” and therefore spend a life of thralldom to a label and a cork, endorsed the general opinion. “Warmer than Bordeaux, but not so full-bodied as Burgundy” is his description, whatever it may mean.

The making of the various brands is a great industry, but so much wine is got through in the country that the export trade is of little account. The conquerors and the conquered are very fond of “potations pottle deep,” as Horace termed it. Which is, I think, such a nice way of putting the case, don’t you?

Through the Tatar Bazaar a wander below the solemn Avlabar Prison leads on across the river to the old market-place of Turkish days, and hereabouts are the labyrinthine cellars where the wine supply of Tiflis is stored.

In an evil-smelling little cave room, airless and infinitely gloomy, we found a shaven-headed Tatar worthy converting the whole skin of a calf into a mammoth wine bottle. The hair had been left on the skin, and thickly coated with naphtha of the consistency of train-grease. Next, the industrious worker proceeded to sew the pathetic disembodied creature into a semblance of its former self.

The man left his task to take us down to his storage cellar—a rouble bribed him. Here was a catacomb of weird shapes! Contorted skins filled to bursting point, lay on shelves, animal wraiths made less fearsome by a rare weave of silver cobwebs. In and out the gossamer cables twisted, and amid the criss-cross of slender strands colossal spiders, striped like wasps, waited patiently for the sugar-loving flies who crept about in sated indolence.

Our guide, who had lived so long among his Noah's Ark of inflated animals that he had taken on to some extent their grim appearance, swept away the maze of enshrouding gauze that we might see the panorama better, gathering up the silver tissue in henna-stained hands. The cobwebs removed, the charm of the place vanished. It was ugly, *bizarre*. The light of day was what we wanted, not hideous Has-Beens, filled to repletion with Kakheti wine.

On the old market-place a great crowd gathered, and from the network of streets people hurried to an impromptu platform, where a group of long-coated figures fought for a foothold. We joined in the rush, pressing alongside a Georgian woman of the people, cocoon-like in an all-enveloping wrapper and a brilliantly embroidered tiara-cap, from which hung a long white veil, on her dark hair. She was so anxious to be in time, that, like the Mad Hatter, she wandered glass of tea in one hand, and a little hard circle of bread, which she called a "bublik," in the other.

Forcing our way to the edge of the rough daïs, we looked up at the fierce frieze of Hebraic faces and

waited for the show to begin. Cecily promised to translate as things progressed, but half the time the Russian eluded her, or it wasn't Russian, but a *patois* of Tatar, or something. But we caught a little, and in a political meeting all over the world enough is as good as a feast.

One stalwart, more pushing than the rest, began to harangue, punctuating his words with a long whip. Crack! We demand this! Crack! We demand that! For all the world like the familiar tub-thumper of Hyde Park. Then a great shout arose. Stephan would speak. Stephan! Stephan! Evidently the Lord Rosebery of the Caucasus.

“Stephan! Stephan!”

The words rolled away, a riot of resonant sound, over the Maidan, up and up to the hoary ruined fortress built by Mustapha Pacha in the sixteenth century. The harsh echoes woke the hallowed spell, and the towers flung back the name faintly, tersely, “Stephan! Stephan!”

The orator was hoisted aloft, a little weather-beaten figure, but clean and well brushed-up looking. “Your politicians have evermore a taste of vanity.” He looked at the crowd in an all-embracing smile of gay friendliness, shaking his head the while. At last he spoke.

“I will wait,” translated Cecily, “I will wait until I have something to say.”

If every orator followed Stephan's example, what on earth would become of our political meetings!

Some diplomatist—Talleyrand, I think—told us that

in a political career it is just all the world to know how to quit the arena with a smiling grace. Stephan had learnt the lesson. He vanished as he had come, on the shoulders of the people, laughing and bowing as he sank submerged. And there we left him.

Perhaps Stephan found his subject later. I cannot tell.

Returning to our *auberge* we found Kenneth on the verandah, sitting in a bower of red geraniums, tired out after a hunt for a sort of dragoman-courier. He was taking a little rest, he said, reading of the misfortunes of Calandrino in the Decameron. Something like the old soldier who found peace in the pages of the first volume of the official history of the South African War.

The Caucasus has not as yet, luckily for its comfort, produced the species of dragoman peculiar to the East, and the local make-shift guides are not even a graft on the well-known type, being manufactured on the whilst-you-wait principle. Nomadic European travellers in the Caucasus are not plentiful enough to create a race of vampire travelling servants. Even the roads of the country in its wilder parts are constructed on the old Spanish principle of keeping people off them.

If you feel that you cannot do without a guide and express that desire, something will turn up. And from the recesses of old Tiflis came Ali Ghirik, a black-browed, extremely old stalwart from Daghestan. After a soaking in one of the famous baths, he seemed a really worth-having acquisition, notwithstanding his

weight of years. Our requirements were extremely simple, for we sought no professed courier, but a hard-as-nails fellow, willing to saddle and picket horses, fetch and carry, cook for us on occasion, talk for us, translate for us, and assist us in the carrying through of any project.

Our would-be servant spoke Avar, his own tongue, and claimed acquaintance with Tatar, Georgian, and Russian. Of English he knew a few words; one in particular, "Look!" pleased him mightily. An excellent stock-in-trade for a guide, too, and I wonder where he picked it up. He often used it when there was nothing to look at, and smiled as though realizing how often he sprung the allusion and how much he liked it.

He had a "character," a *chit* given him by a Russian officer. The worn old piece of paper set forth that Ali had many excellent qualities, counter-balanced by many failings. He was very truthful, a somewhat negligible point, the writer added, among the Eastern tribes. Ali Ghirik counted this as something to be proud of, and pointed out the words to us with a henna-stained forefinger. Well, he was right. A Washingtonian character is the most valuable asset to which a servant can aspire. It enables him to tell as many fibs as ever he pleases.

The lengthy credential went on to hint that had Ali been a Christian he would have been perfect morally. As it was, a half-hearted Mahommedanism demoralized him.

But Christianity, to my mind, is not comprised of

morals as the world accepts the term. The worst man has some touch of divinity in him. Ali Ghirik wore his generously.

“ We are going to shoot in the mountains of Daghestan ! ” I said, through the medium of Kenneth. “ Do you know that part of the country well ? ”

Our would-be henchman sniffed scornfully.

“ I ! Ali Ghirik, who fought with Schamyl ! ”

I felt abashed. It is a wise man who knows his own capacity.

Schamyl, the famous patriot-fanatic of the Caucasus, leader of the mountain tribes who for thirty years held at bay the mighty power of Russia, made his last stand at Guinib, in Daghestan. Ali Ghirik, therefore, was a find indeed. Though he was but a stripling in the stirring days of the fifties, he would be able to tell us of his chief, of the ambuscades and wild sorties in the grim ravines, of the schemes and plots and plans which made Schamyl what he was.

The best definition of the character of the remarkable chieftain that I ever heard, or read, came from our servant.

“ The greatness of Schamyl was so great,” he said proudly, “ that it made his littlenesses less than nothing.”

CHAPTER V

JOURNEYING TO THE HUNTING GROUNDS

I like this place,
And willingly could waste my time in it.
As You Like It.

Disguised like Muscovites in shapeless gear.
Love's Labour's Lost.

KENNETH was very loth to leave the fleshpots of Tiflis for an expedition into the wilderness. It was, he said, a regrettable feature of modern life, this always wanting to be somewhere else. Just as though we had journeyed all those miles to stew in Tiflis with the thermometer standing at 85° indoors. He even worked in that peculiarly irritating proverb about rolling stones. Such a silly saying, I always think, for if the perambulating pebble didn't gather moss it would pick up experience, I suppose.

It was all very well for Kenneth. *Cherchez la femme!* He was bent on enduring the tropical heat in order that he might be near a Georgian lady of his admiration, who did not seem to mind the torrid climate in the least. She had, my cousin said, a mouth which he could only describe as "Boca provocativa." I don't speak Spanish, so haven't an idea what it means, but it is evidently something hard to get. We were not

alarmed as to the result of the infatuation, for the average Scotchman in love, unless matters take a very unusual turn, may be trusted to think his thoughts and refrain from expressing them. Very different from the Irish lover, who says things he does not think, and still more unlike the English swain, who merely implies and neither says nor thinks.

After a lot of quibbling and changing of minds, we forced Kenneth into an expedition, taking us in the first place to the mountains above the Kakheta valley, and from thence into Daghestan after ibex ; but our start was still further delayed the while my cousin helped the Powers that Were to evolve an easily worked scheme for finding our publisher acquaintance, who, in persistently hunting for the original of a scene in his last issued colour-book, had lost himself somewhere in the mountains of the Laila. A small expedition was being detailed to retrieve our countryman, and a description of the wanderer compiled. It was read over to us for approval, and I did feel glad the publisher was missing and could not hear it. The pen portrait would not have pleased the great man at all.

“Does he answer to this?” queried an official, dwelling on the size, shape, and style of the lost one.

“I think so,” said Kenneth. “He always answered to everything.”

Our prince of the railway train dined with us the night before we left Tiflis, and his description of the sport to be obtained in the beautiful Kuban valley which environed his home on the skirts of Karbarda

induced us to promise gladly the inclusion of that region in our wanderings. Thereabouts the prince had a country house, where he raised horses for the Caucasian army, and there, in September, we might hunt the great stag of the country; the ibex of the region, *Capra Pallasii*; chamois, and bears, if we were not critical of their coats, lynxes, wolves, foxes, and game birds of many varieties. So it was arranged, and the route planned, the time fixed.

"*Au jour!*" said the prince earnestly, raising his glass.

I got a terrific shock. Could it be possible that the now celebrated toast, said to be drunk nightly in the German Navy, is also honoured in the Caucasus! Visions of further necessary Dreadnoughts beset me, and—but our gallant was merely referring to the day of days when we should "condescend to visit his inferior establishment." At least, that is how Cecily translated his next words, which had lapsed into Russian, as was usual with him. Very likely he said something quite different. Whenever my two cousins relied on their knowledge of the language of the country, the situation always grew as desperate as could be.

We sent forward to meet us at Signakh six cargo mules in charge of a little Tatar engaged by Ali Ghirik. His name sounded like Yakimo, so Yakimo we called him. He told us that his mules could carry three hundred pounds each, but we thought that rather a stiff load day after day, and arranged a whole holiday for every animal in turn, and saw to it that the packs weighed considerably less than our muleteer advocated.

Yakimo himself rode a spidery grey mare, which led the string of laden creatures, or rather a little bell played Pied Piper to them.

Yakimo was far from being the muleteer to whom grand opera has accustomed us. You know the dashing, handsome, picturesque figure, with the spotless shirt, crimson knickerbockers, and the cross-gartering from knee to foot, and the whip which cracks to the rhythm of his lilting song?

Crick! Crack! We gallop along
Crick! Crack! We gallop away!

Operatic muleteers always sing that. Our mules didn't gallop along or away. They travelled at snail's pace. And Yakimo had but a feeble imitation of the rousing refrain peculiar to his kind. It came from the depths of him somewhere, like the deep notes of a drum. Sometimes it sounded like the moan of a person in grievous trouble, and other times it seemed to epitomize the aftermath of a lobster supper.



By its very sameness it palled after a few minutes, for, unlike our home anthems in which the same number of words, back-pedalled upon, juggled with, turned this way and that, suffice to keep a choir occupied for quite a long time, the *tune* never varied. It went on and on, interminably.

We had bought ourselves a bourka apiece—such

splendid wraps, and hired six ragged-looking steeds, one each and two for Ali to tow. They were all of pronounced Mongol type, with long coats, like shaggy retrievers. Cecily and I had brought out English saddles, having been forewarned; but Kenneth had to bestride the native variety, which travellers say is good or bad according to the extent of their injuries.

The rider sits in a deep gully, sandwiched between two wooden uprights, the one at the peak being as high as the pommel on a Mexican saddle, and that at the cantle the same. A hard cushion lies in the centre, held in place by a girth which holds the whole affair on the animal's back. The stirrups take one back to medieval times, and are designed on the ground-plan of the common house-shovel. They skewer the rider's legs into a horizontal position, which becomes exceedingly painful if endured for long at a time.

All Caucasian horses are ridden on the snaffle, and, bar the torture of the local saddlery, riding is a very easy business. The little steeds, like the Canadian Cayuse, break at once into a rocking-horse lope, which Ali Ghirik called "enokod," a name which seemed as delightfully apt and to the point as that of Dr. Cook's celebrated Eskimo friend, Etukishook.

Our ponies had been shod for climbing with Turkish shoes—flat plates which cover in all the sole of the foot save for a small O in the centre. This novel farriery certainly did facilitate the negotiation of difficult slopes, but on bad roads the result can be only likened to an equine attempt at roller skating.

After loading up very much after the congested

fashion of the White Knight in "Alice through the Looking-Glass," we set forth one early morning, taking a circuitous route by which we should avoid the post road, a busy trading channel to the Kakheta valley, from whence the great fourgons laden with the celebrated wine would be constantly passing, and raising more of the terrible dust which had already bothered us to endure with equanimity.

Kenneth had rigged himself up in complete Caucasian kit, because he had read somewhere what a comfortable tourist outfit it makes. He looked a frightful sight, mostly because his waist was so thick round. The natives are very slim, and possess most graceful figures. By the side of Ali Ghirik my warrior cousin looked like a caricature of anti-fat variety, in which he illustrated the "before taking," and our servant the "after." They both looked ready for any emergency. In addition to a kinjal and another weapon of similar pattern, Ali had a tremendous flint-lock strung on a leather thong across his back. We thought it useless as a firearm, but extremely beautiful as a relic. It was of considerable age, with a stock inlaid in a fine design of gold and silver, and a Damascus barrel of best silver steel inset with a scroll design of gold.

Kenneth had a kinjal, too, which he found greatly in his way. At last, after sitting on the thing, and hurting himself badly, this part of the local colour was consigned to the depths of a saddle-bag as too cumbersome for anything.

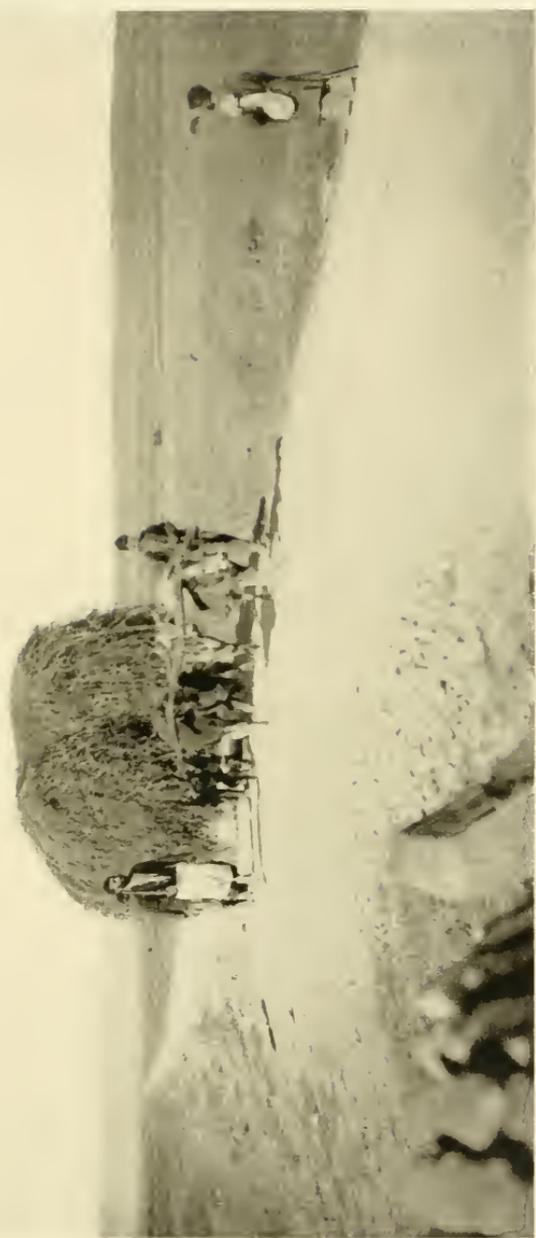
The weapon being worn in front, with the handle

inclined to the right to allow of its being instantly drawn from the sheath, makes for awkwardness for those who have had no experience of a poniard in such a position. I tried pulling out a specimen from its scabbard and lunging with it, just to see how "hefty" an implement it was. Ali Ghirik corrected me, saying that no brave foeman thrusts, the straight-pointed stab is for cowards only! The heroes of old-time Daghestan hacked and slashed, but never drove a kinjal right home.

Leaving the town, we crossed the railway and rode over prairie-like country, burnt and parched up, where dull-coloured lizards gorged on grasshoppers, and a haze of heat, light as gossamer, hung about the arid space. In early spring, our servant told us, this khaki-tinted expanse is a mass of waving green. How I should love to see it so!

You could hardly distinguish the lizards from the ground, so much the colour of their surroundings were the speckled grey-brown flat bodies. If you touch one with your whip he commences digging a grave for himself, into which he wriggles and lies feigning death, with eyes closed wearily. A most engaging little creature.

A rise of rolling ground, and then down into a titanic amphitheatre, an Olympic stadium, four or five miles long and perhaps a mile across. This basin traversed, our way, narrowing to a track, wound up the hills to high steppe land, where a group of Cosacks guarded miles of hay country, newly cut, and heaped in sweet-smelling ricks, ready for conveyance in forage wagons to the stables of the Viceroy.



FOR THE STABLES OF THE VICEROY

The very sound of the word "Cossack" has a martial ring about it, but these particular examples were bucolic to a degree. Ali Ghirik, who since his strenuous days with Schamyl, and, in spite of a most warlike appearance, had joined the Peace Society, would have us think of Cossacks as uncontrollable fiends. In fact, according to our henchman, all soldiers are but a trifle better than Lucifer himself. A most amusing heresy! For, if anything, soldiers the world over are better than most men of other gregarious communities. We are all creatures of environment, and every army worth calling an army has traditions, traditions which honour honour and shame dishonour; examples, also, which teach respect to betters, discipline, self-restraint, and other wholesome lessons. Human nature is the same wherever we find it, but what influence environment has works for good in a soldier. The worst of it all is that the best soldiers are too occupied to let the world know the good there is in them. This by the way!

The outstanding quality in Cossacks, transcending their powers of riding and endurance, is an overwhelming desire to know, to discover. Graceful submission is the only way out of it, evasion merely prolongs the interrogation. The first question is always the same—how old are you? The parrying of this embarrassment with us was always unsuccessful. Truth in the Caucasus requires solemn proofs to press her down, and the wildest Cossack is man of the world enough to know that women have two ages, the number of years that have passed since birth, including all the summers and winters, and the age they wish

to convey to the world, especially that part of it composed of the masculine sex. Curiously, men also have several ages. Does not the Immortal One fix them at seven? The Cossack himself has a true age and a regimental age, but he differs from femininity in this respect, that he will assume a greater age than is his.

Other questions follow in quick succession. If you are not married, would you like to be, and why aren't you? Then the inevitable query as to the state of your exchequer. I am not carping, but commenting, merely. The trait of inquisitiveness is not to be despised. People who are least curious are most invertebrate. Depend on it, an active concern in human affairs is the best antiseptic against human decay. An interest, a hobby, or even a good wholesome crank, provided it remains a crotchet and does not degenerate into a mania, sets Anno Domini at defiance, and gives us the key to a world of our own, in which we may readily forget the world that is.

Farther, a primitive village had grown up, where all the domestic animals prowled in the High Street, seeking what they might devour, and the dogs, fierce vengeful brutes, bounded up to our saddles snapping and snarling.

Through miles of undulating wheat, an outspread cloth of gold, we loped gaily to the skirts of the mountains, drawing rein occasionally to look at square-sided watch-towers, remnants of other days, when Akhaltsik and Akhalkilak were in Turkish occupation.

We passed through a desolate settlement of miserable clay hovels grouped close together, primitive abodes enough, windowless, with roughly fashioned door cavities blocked with stones. They were the winter homes of Tatar herdsmen, summer wanderers after the grass lands. The shepherd is rather a lazy specimen, or he would build him a more pretentious dwelling of the wood which here at least was all about for the taking.

Across the meeting of the waters of several streams we rode up a deep glen, a wooded rift set in the groins of an Atlas supporting the skies. We prepared a belated meal from the luxuries in our saddle-bags, and Ali Ghirik, though a professional Mussulman, did not hesitate to eat with us.

Up and up we climbed, passing beneath lofty trees which seemed to take us to the heart of an English forest, threading our way through the dense undergrowth with difficulty. A startled roe-deer, rare in these parts, looked out at us from an embrasure of shadowy green, ears cocked and all inquisitive eyes, like Coleridge's "sly satyr peeping through the leaves."

The dry bed of a stream led us through a luxuriant fern belt where fronded forms tossed in the wind, graceful tree-ferns and maiden-hairs of tremendous size. Here a curious natural-history phenomenon presented itself. A hare came rushing down the narrow way to meet us, and, sighting us, became so paralysed with fear that it could not move. Ali Ghirik, who was leading, jumped from his horse and, seizing a stone, was about to deal the little

creature its death blow when Cecily called loudly to our man. With a tremor the hare regained the use of his frozen limbs, and in a little sideway spring was off into the wilderness. A hare cannot see directly to his front, owing to the conformation of his eyes, and this may have helped to put him at our mercy.

So to higher altitudes, and all the way Cecily explained to the astonished Ali the ethics of the Law of the Sporting Chance, a statute hitherto unknown to the bewildered Daghestani, whose rule it was to kill if you had the opportunity, without delving into the morals of the matter.

These high pasture lands were dotted with fine oaks and beeches, in whose shade nomadic shepherds watched over great flocks of curly-woolled sheep, with the fattest tails, weighing, I should think, perhaps four or five pounds.

The herdsman in the Caucasus is content with a very simple kosh, or shelter. A rough tent of sheepskins, or a rock-screened hollow, a skin bagful of sour milk, a quire or two of paper-like bread, fresh-killed mutton for the roasting, and our shepherd has all of the Jug, Bough, Thou, and Paradise Enow.

The crest of the range rose above us still, and the climbing of it was not to be negotiated on horseback. The turf grew slipperier, and every one of us took a different line of ascent, that he or she might not be involved in a possible *débâcle* from above. The ponies, left more or less to their own devices, reached the summit level after a goat-like climb, and fell to on the summer garden outspread before them.

Here was colour, gorgeous, superb. Glowing red poppies wound in crimson paths through a sea of gentians, tiny starry forget-me-nots trusted to our discernment to single them out from the flaunting masses of wild sunflowers spreading far and wide in a midsummer fire of gold. Clouded yellow butterflies fluttered on slender wings above the wealth of flora, fritillaries, too, like white blossoms blown by the wind.

Far, far below us the pathless steppes ranged along the valley of the Kura, streaking off in dull tones of brown and gold to distant Baku, and across the parched plains wound the silvery river, glinting in the sun, tirelessly journeying to the Caspian. To the north, through the haze, gleamed the snow-tipped peaks of the main chain.

Mounting our unwilling steeds we rode across uneven rolling ridges, a pasture land of ups and downs, with little emerald glens between the grass-clothed billows.

A wild, picturesque shepherd, with a lithe youthfulness in his step, paced the crest of a ridge ahead, playing a primitive lute. Back and forth he peacocked, his tattered garments fluttering in the wind. Suddenly he turned and descended the hill-side towards us, intoning his "muse" as he went. As he walked, in rapt enchantment, putting his feet into holes and boulders, the very stones followed him, Orpheus-like, and the sapling straying in his path bent to his will. And at the foot of the slope Eurydice waited; Eurydice, clad in a brilliant red skirt and cuirass of sheepskin.

Riding down the ridge until we came to the timber

line, we debated our path of descent. Far below us a little village gleamed white amid the green, like a pure-plumaged gull resting on the ocean. In and out the depths the winding Iora River, a beautiful little stream of rippling reaches and make-believe falls, threaded its devious course.

Our first essay at cutting downwards led to an unfathomable engulfment, from which we were only saved by the sagacity of the leading horse. As the great crevass gloomed before him he planted his forefeet firmly and snorted his distaste.

Ascending or descending, the rider simply leaves the conduct of the journey to his steed. Caucasian ponies, trained to the use of their wits, are completely thrown off if you take to supplying any so-called support at the mouth. The resourceful creatures do not require it, and may be trusted to get you to the bottom or top with safety if allowed to engineer the trip entirely for themselves. Never was there such sagacity. The "rounders up" in the forested ranches of Vancouver Island are not more acute.

To see the Caucasian ponies feeling with their forefeet for a firm hold, to feel the telepathy of their decisions, to place your life in the keeping of the dumb worker, horse-chamois-klipspringer in one, and to know how he cares for it when he gets the chance are, as Blake would say, "portions of Eternity too great for the eye of man."

Harking back a little, we flung ourselves over a half-closed track, down which the fuel storers of years were wont to drag their log harvest. A slippery shute

enough, and we were glad to leave it part way down for the thickness of a jungle tangle where the beard moss hung in swaying festoons across the path of the woods, flinging long shadows on the secret lawns, oases in the wilderness, smooth velvet swards for the dancing feet of light-limbed satyrs, and sweet burdened winds, full of the incense of coming autumn, carried a sentient message upwards to the snow-tiers.

The density lightened, and the smiling valley below opened out before us like a stage scene as the curtain rolls up. Little gardens—for every Russian Reservist is given his small holding as an inducement to him to come and play pioneer in the wilds—clung to the almost perpendicular slopes of the hill-side. Cabbage plants, destined some day to reach the large white-headed stage, without which no reservist commissariat is complete, and the stchi, a watery broth, could not be manufactured, grew in rows between lines of golden maize. To the top of the low foot-hills flourished the carefully staked-out plots, ablaze with colour, and crimsoned by the last rays of the evening sun.

Ali Ghirik was delighted.

“Look!” he cried in English, lapsing into Russian. “Look! The fields in this valley stand on end!”

He was like the Irishman who had filched a little garden from the inhospitable perpendicular of the Kerry hills. “Sure,” he said admiringly, “it is like a map of the world hanging against the wall.”

We rode into the village as night was falling, a busy little artillery cantonment, where we knew a

welcome awaited us in the quarters of a friendly gunner whose acquaintance we made in Tiflis.

It had been a Prasník—Saint's Day. A very fragile reason brings a prasník, and, inevitable fixtures apart, some years there are so very many—our ribald host told us this—that there are more prasníks than days on which to keep them. The leanest years bring more than a hundred.

In the verandahed whitewashed house our hosts at by the samovar drinking the weak tea beloved of Russians. The very instant the boiling water has been poured on the leaves it is poured off again. Most English travellers affect to prefer this weak decoction, flavoured with lemon, and served in little glasses, to our own home-brewed. I like the tea-cup idea much better, and but for the myriad lumps of sugar the Muscovite might as well be swallowing hot water, slightly dashed with lemon. Tea comes on at all hours of the day with a frequency only equalled on Canadian ranches.

Everything in the little tin-roofed abode was very rough, but very ready, and the tremendous ungrudging hospitality of Russians would make up for any deficiencies. Kenneth was quartered somewhere else, as the house was only able to raise one "best room."

I always think that there are two hubs necessary to every household, and if they aren't there all things must go haphazard. The mother and the kitchen fire. You may be able to manage without them, lots of people have to, but it is only managing at the best. Our host had neither comfort. No mother, because soldiers

aren't allowed them in barrack quarters; no real kitchen fire, only a make-believe in a portable tiny stove.

Next morning we set off before the sleeping cantonment thought of waking up, and made our plans for the day as we sat in our saddles surrounded by a small group of early-bird soldiers who surveyed us with interest, and—I must confess it—some amusement. The English traveller in the great waste places of the Caucasus is an astonisher. Why anyone, Alpine climber, sportsman, or wandering nomad, should leave a comfortable home to take pot-luck in so rough a land is an unfathomable puzzle to the Russian mind, and a complete mystery to the native.

Kenneth was anxious to descend on Telav by way of a mountain track which he had had described to him, but Cecily and I wanted to save our horses for days of future effort, so were against this *en l'air* excursion from the route planned.

“ You tak' the high road,
And I'll tak' the low road ”

settled matters. Ali Ghirik elected to remain with us. He was, so far, a sombre, unsmiling individual, not “used” to us yet, and, all-forgetful of his rough upbringing in the mountains of Daghestan, was inclined to disapprove of the quarters allotted to him the night before. The fleshpots of Tiflis were in his mind's eye, and so filled his primitive landscape that our glorious horizon was obscured.

Our road zig-zagged up a mighty gorge, a sharp

cleft in the range of mountain giants around us. Creaking arbas, the native two-wheeled carts of Georgia, prehistoric as Boadicea's chariot, passed us with scarce an inch to spare. The primitive vehicles are made entirely of wood, even the nails are pegs, and the groans of the heavy-moving contraptions announce their approach from a long way off. Four lumbering oxen dragged each load of swollen skins, filled with wine from the Kakheti valley.

Set in the face of the scarped precipice above us were tiers of the black-mouthed caverns so often come upon in Georgia, the troglodyte homes of Strabo's describing. One historian puts forward the idea that these man-made caves, often inaccessible save by rope from the heights above, are in reality ancient places of sepulture; another antiquarian submits that the constructed fastnesses have never had any purpose save that of providing impregnable strongholds, which have been used again and again from prehistoric times. The little openings, here cut out from the solid rock, are arranged in lines, in varying numbers, tier on tier, never less than three in a row, sometimes many more.

To the unarchæological mind it does not seem very likely that anyone, even with the knack of construction peculiar to the ancients, would have prepared such intensely awkward-to-get-at tombs, and no evidence is forthcoming to support the theory. Numerous burial places of the Stone and Bronze Age have been discovered all over the Caucasus, but the cliff refuges seem what they seem, invincible homes for warlike

cave-dwellers, dating back to an unknown era in primeval times.

The grim scenery gave place to verdant pasture lands, where Tatar shepherds, accompanied by their sisters, their cousins, and their aunts, passed the summer in big gipsy-like encampments, tending flocks of sheep, goats, and a few unkempt ponies. Here and there the herdsmen, in spare hours, had contrived curious half-underground abiding-places, round which the feminine part of the community gossiped and made Kalmuck tea from black brick-like slabs reminiscent of the compressed coal-dust hawked about London suburbs, and supposed by economical housewives to make for domestic economy.

Kalmuck tea, so-called because this cheap variety of the beverage of the country is a sort of patent evolved by the tribes in Astrakhan, is sometimes converted into a most unholy soup, and drunk with a flavouring of pepper and salt.

A grim-looking old man was busily painting the shoulders of a sickly bullock with a smelling concoction which Ali Ghirik said was castor oil. The artist used a switch of grass adroitly fashioned into a brush, laying on his colour lavishly. The patient creature was thus anointed because his skin had cracked in the heat, and the cure is very general throughout the country. Castor oil plants are a great feature in some of the agricultural districts.

The old painter's face was riven in terrific slashes, healed into ugly cicatrices, grim relics, Ali explained, in his very best personally-conducted-tour fashion, of

the Tatar Bairam, though the damage looked to me far more illustrative of a tumble unawares into a greenhouse.

The Tatar Bairam was a savage orgy, and is entirely banned now by the Russians, though it is said that in remote and inaccessible corners this self-mutilation and immolation still goes on.

This Bairam, a fierce graft on the Mahommedan festivals, is a "that's for remembrance" usage inaugurated by the Amazon Queen Lutra of Erivan. This warlike lady, who was slain in battle with the Russians æons ago, left instructions to her tribesmen to hack themselves about on a given day, once a year, and after a short time in other hunting grounds she would return—though why a mutilated nation advanced the time of her re-incarnation history sayeth not—and be such a Queen as the world has never known, whose reign would lift the Tatars to a condition of unparalleled magnificence.

Alas, Queen Lutra! Either her subjects obeyed her behests in too feeble a fashion or another land allured her. Anyway, as Ali Ghirik said mournfully, with a philosophical acceptance of a situation which mattered nothing to him, "She never came! She never came!"

Because Lutra asked a sacrifice they all believed in her, and believe in her furtively still. Had she made the sacrifice herself things would have been otherwise. Caucasian cynics simply don't believe in a feminine disregard of personal advantages. The most laudable, patriotic action of woman's unselfishness would be received with a critical "*Cherchez l'homme!*"

CHAPTER VI

STILL JOURNEYING TO THE HUNTING GROUNDS

Tartars, never trained
To offices of tender courtesy.
Merchant of Venice.

Down again from the highlands to a country of uninteresting plainness stretching away, dull-toned, to the foot of bare, low hills, whose stony slopes seemed to throw off the sun's fiery rays like reflectors. The heat was insufferable, and the dust blinding.

Round a little pool—an oasis in the waste—marched a light-footed swineherd, a stick across his shoulders, swinging along with the purposeful abandon of a piper in the throes of a soul-stirring pibroch. His pigs wallowed waist-deep in the water, the quaintest pigs possible to see. Nature had fitted them out with coats for any climate. The length of their hair ran to inches, and its thickness would have astonished our own sparsely covered porkers.

The swineherd—a Georgian—ranged alongside to give us kindly greeting, wishing us the “dila mshvidobisa,” or “Morning of peace,” which the flies and the sun made it difficult to secure. And at our desire Ali Ghirik taught us to reply, “Madobeli vart,” “I thank you.”

We would have liked to chat awhile, to ask why the pigs were so small and their coats so long, but our henchman, who sat his horse stiffly, disdainingly the pig-eater, would none of it. His vocabulary had no equivalent for swine.

Georgian salutations are as poetical as the nation. Often in the by-roads, as a Georgian horseman passed along in his national costume, which has nothing of the ubiquitous tscherkesska about it, he would smilingly greet us with the beautiful and touching address, redolent, surely, of the struggles of old Georgia, "Gamardjweba!" "I wish thee the victory." To which, coached by our linguistic servant, we made the necessary reply, "Gaguimardjos!" "May God grant thee victory."

These salutations were used by Ali Ghirik for all Christians indiscriminately. For True Believers he reserved "Aleikum," the Volapuk of friendliness between all the tribes of Islam.

Over the crest of a bleak pass we journeyed to a wooded vale of luxuriance, the celebrated valley of Kakheti, a faceted gem set in the crown of monarchs towering to the sky, 10,000 feet of them, peak on peak, tier on tier. Hither and thither from the forested foothills wandered silvery streams, trickling their winding ways to pay tribute to the rushing river cutting through the heart of the valley.

Was ever so beautiful a road! On one side of us the sheen of sunflowers, on the other the torrent singing its insistent song, backed by white vestments of mist enveloping the shadowy groins of the sweep of moun-



A GEORGIAN SWINEHERD

tains. Ahead trailed the long, winding way, dotted with picturesque wagons filled with the soft gold of the apples of this Hesperides. For here, in this irrigated region, was such a maze of fruit, such flowers and orchards and vineyards, as to make beholders think that the unending source of Covent Garden is tapped at last.

Hordes of unkempt Tatars, with beards dyed fiery red, matching the glint of their eyes, worked on the roads in bursts of frenzied enthusiasm followed by spells of dawdling indifference. Two very primitive tents of skins sewn together flapped and strained at their moorings, and up and down strode a tatterdemalion playing sweet music on a collection of loose pipes tied to a bag fashioned from a roughly dried chamois skin.

Another hour's easy going, through a wilderness of enchanting gardens, brought us to Telav, a solidly built town, capital of the old kingdom of Kakheti.

The greater part of the city of to-day, spread over the shoulders of two hills, is not very old, for again and again through the centuries has it been destroyed by invaders. In its palmy days the place was surrounded by a fortress wall, bits of which, apparently of great antiquity, are still to be seen.

The fertile valley has ever been a tumultuous battle ground. Timurleng, Lame Timur, the Tatar conqueror, passed through in the fourteenth century, burning, pillaging, and sacking as he went, razing to the ground the little churches where the native Christians "made their adorations, disagreeable to God," as

Shereffedin Ali, in his *Life of Timur* naively described it. The wily Timur chose the winter for his onslaught, knowing that the great basin in the hills would be snow-filled, and escape difficult. "The side of the mountain, which had been pure white with snow, became as red as a field of tulip with the blood of these infidels," is Shereffedin's poetical way of putting the horrors of the incursion.

We rode past a very Eastern-looking Arcade, or Bazaar, through stone-paved streets to the local Ritz, where an evil-faced proprietor received us in chilling fashion. That illogical connexion which binds rudeness and truth, politeness and insincerity, was probably responsible for the trust we placed in our unprepossessing host.

"So rugged was he that we thought him just,
So churlish was he that we deemed him true."

And, of course, he was neither, and a very bad hotel-keeper at that. However—needs must, and we thought it too late to seek another lodging.

Telav lies on the main posting route from Tiflis to Petrovsk, and the habitations known as post-stations which offer hospitality to the traveller o' nights need a page of description to themselves.

The first necessity, without which no self-respecting post-house would have a reason for holding up its roof, is a bright oleograph of the Tsar of all the Russias. His eyes are very blue, his hair matches the lavish gold decorations which spread all over his tunic and descend to the frame line at the waist, farther, I expect, if we could only follow.

The guest-room, where you wait whilst the horses are being changed, is fitted with a couple of prison-like trestle beds—usually guiltless of any pretence at a covering—long enough for a dwarf, a common chair or two, and—perhaps—a table.

Russians travel along the post-roads of the country with an outfit of mattresses, pillows, etc., in case they seek the roadside caravanserais, but as a rule they go straight forward night and day to the journey's end. Every necessity in the way of food and drink must be carried, as these semi-hotels do not set out to provide meals, although at the more go-ahead examples it is possible to obtain bread, not always black, which for some occult reason is never cooked through, eggs, and the sour milk, known as aïram, beloved of the Caucasian tribes. It is curdled with rennet, and then mixed with water, and keeps, apparently, for an indefinite time.

The samovar is the next *sine quâ non* to the Tsar, and this brazen urn arrangement, heated from the centre by a cylinder filled with charcoal, is a very simple device for the boiling of water quickly. Tea every traveller carries in his stores. Plates and cups are occasionally to be had for a small fee, and wood for the fire in the guest-room—we are now discussing a veritable Carlton in post-houses—is supposed to be provided once *à prix fixe*. If you require a second supply the cost is what the local Shylock demands. In the rougher shelters the windows are innocent of glass, and no arrangements are made for washing. Cleanliness is not encouraged. As one inquisitive post-

master queried when I lamented the lack of water :
“ But why wash ? ”

When Kenneth arrived from his mountain trip and saw the sort of scullery in which we were to be located, *à trois*, for the night, he went out to seek a rival establishment, and returned triumphant. We moved over, very willingly, to a well-built *auberge*, filthily dirty as to its inside and excessively under-staffed. There was nobody to attend to our simplest needs, and the situation ended in a general *sauve qui peut*. Two other travellers were in like case, Georgians, who were busily contriving meals and arranging shakedowns of sorts in uninviting-looking bare rooms. They were both princes, so, of course, we had to let them annex the best locations and have first go in at the samovar.

Finally, Cecily and I stood possessed of an apartment boasting a dirty torn carpet, a hot-bed for insects, two wooden trestle beds, cursed with the remains of mattresses, which we evicted and placed on the landing, where they were found and pounced upon by a perambulating prince.

Far from cleanliness being next to godliness here, it was next to impossible. After a grieved request for water addressed to space by Cecily, one of the royalties bestirred himself, and gallantly produced from somewhere a little basin and a still smaller jug of tepid water. With a friendly glance he bade my cousin hold her fingers one at a time over the bowl, when he would have pleasure in pouring the contents of the jug over them. The solemn rite over, our friend disappeared to provide a similar treat for me. This time, however,

he seemed to have secured the leavings from someone's teapot, so letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would" my chance passed.

Just as dawn crept ghostlike through the curtainless window all the air vibrated with a most unexpected sound—a lion's roar! It was unmistakable. In great, throaty, hoarse, spasmodic coughs the King saluted us. We sat up on the miserable pallets masquerading as beds, and "Did you hear it?" we exclaimed in unison. The sonorous voice thrilled us through and through. Little waves of feeling broke on the beach of memory.

Ah, Your Majesty we don't know what you are doing in Telav—probably you don't know yourself—but Salaam! Salaam! and again Salaam!

A very early hour saw us sallying forth to find him. Kenneth said we had been dreaming, as though two people could dream the same dream at once, and as though even a dream fancy could produce a voice so wonderful!

"Where is the lion?" asked Cecily simply, of the first Russian soldier we met.

He smiled, and directed us to a hollow in the town area, and then, lest the place should elude us, came too.

A species of fair run by Persian showmen occupied a patch of land, where in primitive cages on wheels happy families lived. One prison-house had about a dozen monkeys, a tortoise, a sheep, and two pigs, all on the best of terms with each other. The largest ape sat on a tortoise throne, and the pigs reposed beneath two

monkeys each. A tiger and our lion kept company, and all sorts of incongruities consorted.

A performance of sorts was imminent, and as we were getting rather bored our Russian friend asked a young Persian standing by the cage whether the lion-show was worth seeing.

"I am the lion-tamer!" he replied frigidly.

For the rest, every booth sold icons, or holy pictures, horribly gaudy, inartistic oleographs of all the saints in the calendar and a few over. These are essential elements in the Orthodox Christianity of the Muscovite, much as similar works of art are necessary adjuncts to a properly furnished seaside lodging-house at home.

We wandered back to our "hotel" through a maze of lanes with an old-world picturesqueness of their own. All Telav is a reminiscence. The days of its splendour have passed, and but a wraith of them colours the Bazaar, where each trade keeps itself to itself, and the dealers lounge on divans smoking long pipes, half-asleep and quite indifferent to business. Many of these shopkeepers are Persians, and with Persians trading is always treated as a hobby, not a work of necessity.

In and out of tempting heaps of fruit careful housewives roamed, enveloped in loose print wrappers and decorously veiled. Great reddish-gold melons lay in pyramids, beside pumpkins big enough for Cinderella's coach; velvety grapes, plums, and vast stacks of apples toppling to a fall.

In the bakers' arcade things were very busy. A Tatar—more butcher-like than bakerly, for his belt had two daggers attached, and across his back an old

matchlock dangled—was putting a solid slab of dough into a waiting oven, the bottom of which was covered with a thick layer of round pebbles, “to prevent the dough from burning,” Ali Ghirik explained, lest the palpable fact should elude us. Farther on we saw one of the bread cushions emerge from its cooking-place, quite four feet long, and two or three thick. On its downside the huge loaf was all mottled like the breast of a thrush. When cold it is cut up and sold in pieces.

Before the sun was well awake to his powers, we set off again to seek the wilds, trailing one behind the other through long lines of vines, laden with fruit.

A sombre canyon closed over our heads, and in gloomy darkness we followed the course of a little stream until the gorge opened out into a marshy expanse where the grass grew high, and a miasmatic haze hung over the land. Plop! Here was a quagmire, and no firm ground ahead at all.

Ali advocated a detour through the jungly place to our left, a desperate undertaking! The “wolf’s tooth” thorn of the Caucasus is even more arresting than its first cousin of Somaliland, the “wait-a-bit.”

At last! A rolling country, in the midst of which a whole Georgian village was a-harvesting, down to the youngest inhabitant, who lay on his back in a corn stook, gazing at the brazen sky with the eye power of a young eagle. Nobody was told off to “mind the baby,” and the harvesters who were not asleep beside skin wine-bottles were rushing into one another like possessed beings, making wild cuts with the sickles, and dancing round the yoked oxen to the banging of a

native tom-tom of sorts, which, in a sound volume similar to that which would result from a vigorous crashing together of pan lids, incited everyone to a frenzy of Trojan endeavour. How they didn't cut each other I can't think. A beneficent Providence was at its post.

By a gradual ascent we left the cornfields behind us, and once again passed into the solitudes of dense woods, a forest of Arden, so steeply placed we could not ride our horses, but had to tow them instead.

Here, sunk deep in an ocean of green, high above the valley of Kakheti, gripping the precipitous sides of the ravine with stony feet, stood the dilapidated remains of an ancient church-castle, once evidently a stronghold of some pretensions. The waste places of Georgia and Kakheti are dotted with these decaying reminders of the past. What a business it must have been constructing these chapels and towers and castles on such out-of-the-way sites, often on almost perpendicular slopes. They were tough fellows, those old-time builders !

Chardin, the seventeenth-century traveller, in his own decisive fashion tried to probe the reason for this odd habit of choosing remote peaks and difficult places as the situations of sacred edifices. "I was never able to learn the reason for this foolish practice," he says. "All of those of whom I inquired have ever made the same silly reply: 'It is the custom.'" They are looked at and revered at the distance of several leagues, but they are seldom visited, indeed it is very certain that but few are opened even once in

ten years. They are erected, and then abandoned to the elements and to the fowls of the air. The Georgians are advised that, whatever the nature of their transgressions, they ensure remission by building a small church. "For my own part," adds the inimitably quaint chronicler, "I believe that they erect them in such inaccessible places to avoid the expense of endowing and decorating them."

The present-day appearance of most of the ruined fastnesses of the country would lead the average non-antiquarian to imagine that the deterioration of the structures was far advanced when our British strongholds were just about at the foundation-stone era. As a matter of fact, many of the Caucasian examples were in active use not so very long ago, armed to the teeth, or rather to the battlements, within the space of two hundred years.

Every ruin of warlike pretensions is ascribed to the celebrated brigand Kir Oglu, just as every sanctuary belongs to Queen Tamara. Kir Oglu was a semi-mythical personage, a cross between Robin Hood, Dick Turpin, and Raisuli, who moved about the land in free-and-easy fashion, stabling his horses in every church. He was the greatest of all great highwaymen, and was only routed by the sight of a pistol stuck in the belt of an Italian prisoner. On being told what the weapon was—this happened soon after its invention—and shown its powers, the robber chief went out of the bandit business, saying that he could plainly see his occupation was gone.

Ruined and wild and roofless, our castle tottered to

its fall. Beard moss hung from dislodged stones, weeds grew in every interstice. Across narrow embrasures the spiders had laced their webs in skeins of silver, and on the slender cables dewdrops gleamed like fairy tears. A fragmentary oratory gave sanctuary to the owls, and beneath the rude altar a deep, dark pit yawned mysterious and weird, Valhalla, perhaps, for the souls of slain heroes. Here the sun's rays never penetrated. All was destruction, desolation, death.

A shelter of any kind, so wanderers say, is preferable to no shelter at all, and we had to camp out somewhere, but the gruesome stronghold seemed a place to get away from, not lodge beside.

We groped our way onwards to a smiling glade, through which the river raced, and cavernous bowers, overhung with lofty trees, told of Pan's existence. Firewood was very plentiful, and we soon set the cold at naught. The horses, hobbled, made tremendous meals. Like all of us. Picnics at twilight are much more enjoyable than the humdrum affairs of daylight hours. We christened our camp "Lake View," because it overlooked a natural dam. Not to mention the ones it overheard.

Nothing could be worse than the mosquitoes of these damp woods, except the stuff we bought in Tiflis to keep them off. They were hardly big enough to call mosquitoes, being infinitesimal midges hanging in clouds over rotten tree stumps, and circling in wreaths in lush recesses of the forest. The smallest breath of air drove them away, but, unfortunately, in this deep tangle of vegetation air was scarce. Kenneth

climbed a tree and found peace in the high branches. He called the annoying little pests ephemerids, and told us that ephemeral insects are born in the afternoon and so never see the morning sun, because they all die before midnight. This particular brand upset all his theories. No tiny carcasses strewed the grass at breakfast time. The afternoon-born ones were veterans, and tossed in ascending clouds in the shafts of sunlight slanting through the trees.

My air pillow was a perfect joy to Ali Ghirik, who blew it up and deflated it enthusiastically. He took the wonderful toy to a little distance that he might have it all to himself, and sat cross-legged on a fallen tree. Sometimes he allowed the cushion to exhaust itself slowly and quietly, but more often he clapped vigorous hands against its bulging sides and pressed out the air in a little protesting scream.

Softly the night crept up the steeps, embracing in his soft grey wings the world of green. The stars, in triumphant legion, dotted the heavens, marguerites in a sea of blue. My cork mattress protected me from the damp, my bourka was coverlet and tent ; wrapped in its ample folds, with the braided grasses murmuring a gentle lullaby in my ears, I ought to have slept the sleep of the just, but the eerie feeling of unfathomed spaces in the wood, the fretted silhouette of dark trees against which the shrivelled leaves fell gently to earth like broken-winged birds, and the delicately woven shadows, looming ghostly and weird, kept my senses alert. Lurking abrêks—the local banditti—had no terrors for us, for, though we were told in Telav

that these woods harboured some redoubtable specimens, we were all armed with revolvers, which gave us a feeling of security and importance. Besides, we took it in turns to keep watch and ward beside the fire.

Just as I was at last dozing off to sleep the winged spirit of the ruined castle cried, "Haqq! Haqq! Haqq!" interminably, in wearying regularity. We could not see the bird, but his vibrant note bewrayed him. It was the little Persian owlet, smaller than a thrush, sacred to all good Mahommedans, who call it the "Bird of Testimony," because its eternal "Haqq! Haqq!" means "Truth! Truth!" Sometimes the burden of its song wove itself into the sigh of the wind keeping his tryst on the snow peaks, and sometimes it sounded like the cry of a child in pain. When I suggested the similarity to Kenneth, most unromantic of Scotsmen, he said very crossly that the bird was like nothing else but the most irritating variety of exhaust pipe, and he only wished he had its neck within wringing distance, and other bloodthirsty things. But why, why wish to kill it? I demurred. After all, the Washingtonian disciple was only propounding its creed in season and out, like most testifiers. My cousin didn't see it, and remarked childishly that it was all the same to him if his night's rest was jeopardized whether the owlet said "truth" or "lies," which reminded me of the story of Charles Lamb, and his complaint of the song of the nightingale.

"Surely," said Wordsworth," it is not much of a misery to be kept awake by the bird most musical?"

“ If I am kept awake,” answered Lamb, “ there is no difference between cats or nightingales.”

I opened my eyes in the morning with that sense of wonder as to where one is. My ceiling seemed so very high, my room so remarkably spacious. Down by the river Cecily was conducting a primitive toilet, sitting on a rock, combing her hair, a modern Undine. She was lamenting to her brother that the lack of a looking-glass made for slovenliness, and the difficulty of “ doing ” one’s hair by a sense of feel.

“ Haven’t you got a transformation with you ? ” asked Kenneth, affecting to be helpful, not because he cared a rap for her appearance, but because he was anxious to show his grasp of technique.

“ Do you mean one of those busby-like arrangements advertised by hairdressers in the ladies’ papers ? ” I heard her reply. “ You know quite well I have plenty of hair of my own.”

Ali Ghirik slowly made the fire for our picnic breakfast. He was inclined to be sulky because he had made the discovery that the compass with which we had provided him in order that he might at all times ascertain the direction of Mecca was seriously out of gear, and he had been praying towards a totally opposed corner of the globe.

I watched an impertinent little blue-tit restlessly searching for insects. Every now and again he wrestled with the loose bark of a fallen pine and extricated a large fat grub, too big to swallow save in sections. With each victim the feathered atom gained in self-importance and the conceit of achievement, every flick

of his tail and sideway glance giving out, like Simon Magus, "that himself is some great one."

This routing out of flabby monsters was to him as the stalking of big game to the shikári.

The Lucullus banquet attracted a group of chaffinches, a covey of admiring feminines in sombre garb surrounding a beautiful male in his gayest coat. There are few birds so attractive as he! And here, in far Caucasia, he was forgetting his Latin name of Cœlebs, and had christened himself Benedick, Mormon Benedick!

It is curious to see so many English birds. Some are spring visitors, going northwards and westwards to their breeding haunts, and returning south in autumn to winter quarters, but numbers of them remain throughout the winter. Somehow one expects to find a *rara avis* in every bush, instead—familiar friends, friends and more friends. The willow wren, with his soft silvery song, haunts the wooded mountain slopes, and the yellowhammer sits on the telegraph wires along the Tiflis-Vladikavkaz road, singing plaintively for his supper as with us. Thrushes live in all the woods to a considerable height above sea-level, and down many a forest path I found the little tell-tale heaps of snail-shell debris surrounding the stone on whose sharp anvil the birds battered their victims.

Ali Ghirik did not take much interest in ornithology, and only respected the eagle, orla, and that because of its commanding size and courage. He told me, when I asked him, that all the birds, even the casuals, sing their songs in Russian now.

Pheasants abounded, just the common indigenous species, whose name comes from the ancient Phasis in Colchis. Two thousand five hundred feet above sea level seems about their limit, and talk about Marathon races! I never saw such sprinters. They hardly ever rose from the ground, far preferring to use their legs to their wings. In pheasant shooting everywhere it always seems to me that the only sporting element is finding and pursuing. In these woods even the uncertainty was lacking—the fine birds ran hither and thither wherever you stepped. Vambéry, in his *Travels in Central Asia*, told us of the existent custom of pheasant slaughter by means of sticks. This would be a fatally easy method in the Caucasus. The natives, however, do not seem particularly addicted to fowls of any kind; in fact, no dietary lures them from their mutton, mutton, mutton.

Leaving camp, we commenced the ascent of the ridge again. Our way lay past jagged rifts where the treasure-seekers of long ago had delved for iron ore, "Max," as our servant called it. The deep wounds of the earth had healed in the passing of the years, and from the depths sprung a tangle of beech and walnut trees, whose leaves, level with the top of the riven ground, seemed to close the gap tenderly, as is the way with the Earth-Mother. Nature ever repairs her ravages, just as she kills every non-supporting atom. How much she teaches us! She explains everything. Even the quaint methods on which Ali Ghirik ran his Islamic tenets, the loosest I ever saw, were elucidated here. He illustrated Nature's perspective of ideals,

and bade us not seek too high lest we topple over to a tragic fall like Lucifer ; counselled, too, the shunning of the impossible, for fear that we fail to form a just estimate of our own powers ; told us that we could not jump to heights, but we might climb nearer.

Now we struck a rough cart track, whereon travelled itinerant Tatars, conveying goods on pack-horses to far-away corners of the mountains. The Tatar is the Carter Paterson of the Caucasus.

Each wayfarer had to stop and chat with Ali, from which conversation our man was only dragged with difficulty.

Turgenieff told us of the loquacity of Russians. It pales into insignificance before the unending stream of talk which flows from every Caucasian native.

Perhaps the constant delay irked us the more because we ourselves were out of the interest of the word-bandyng, which went on in Tatar. When we expressed our sense of deprivation, Ali Ghirik said that upon the next occasion he would translate for us all that passed, which he did in the following handsome manner.

“*Aleikum !*” The salutation most in favour with True Believers.

“ Who are these strangers with you ? Are they men or women ? ”

“ That I know not. Sometimes I think the one, sometimes the other. Anyhow ”—pointing to Kenneth, and all unconsciously quoting our Greatest—“ God made him, therefore let him pass for a man. They are travellers, travelling I know not why.”

“ Has he no money that he dresses so ? ”

“ It is as it pleases him. He has clothes at home.”

“ Are they old or young ? ”

“ In truth I cannot say. Judge for yourself.”

“ I cannot,” answered the vagrant farer, investigating us from all sides. “ They resemble nothing I know of. Why does the tall one wear glass in his eye ? ”

“ That I know not. It is his custom.”

“ Would you say these two are his wives ? ”

“ He treats them well, therefore I think it is not so. She,”—indicating Cecily, *à propos* of nothing—“ has hair which falls over her like a cloak of gold. I myself have seen it.”

“ It is very strange that he dresses thus ! ” murmured the chance acquaintance, gazing disapprovingly at Kenneth, unable to get past the amazing apparition.

Our inquisitor came as a critic, and it is so easy to criticize. He had no schooling, therefore no prejudices. He looked from the highest standpoint—the natural aspect.

We descended, by devious paths, guided by a friendly Tatar riding a piebald horse, the one and only piebald I saw in the country, to the post-road connecting Telav with Signakh. Here, at a cross-road, we found a post-house, where we tried to obtain lunch. It produced some animated eggs, a lump of the underdone bread of the country, and some of the wine which Kenneth understood so thoroughly. For our horses the good postmaster provided what he was pleased to term “ oats,” and this “ extra,” for which we had to

pay heavily, was a mixture of one part grain and three parts tiny stones, bits of stick, and earthy débris. I don't know if Caucasian ponies are fitted out with helpful gizzards, but the tough diet in no way upset their equilibriums—they ate the whole mangerful to the last pebble.

In the vineyards all around us, and at house doors, stood colossal dull-coloured jars in which the grape juice ferments at vintage times. These great receptacles, called "kufskins" by the Tatars, and "kwewris" by the Georgians, stand higher than the tallest man, and are four feet or so in circumference, with a holding capacity of six thousand bottles. In one fine vineyard a row of these empty mammoth pots bordered the path to a black-mouthed cave room, excavated from a hill-side—a scene from *The Forty Thieves*. The largest thief would lie safe hidden in the smallest kufskin!

At vintage time the big jars are buried to their necks in the ground for greater convenience of filling. Save in the case of a very limited number of careful vintners the wine manufacture and methods of straining are primitive to a degree. In fact, the so-called straining process appears, from all accounts, to be a sort of general stir-up from which the liquor never clears. From the vast pots the wine is drawn off into the bourdyouky, or buffalo skins, prepared with the naphtha dressing which makes each carcass water-tight and the drink so strongly flavoured.

Signakh—which means "City of Refuge"—hangs on the hill-side like a bee on a heather bell. Seen



SIGONAKI

from below it is a beautiful thing, seen from above more enchanting still, seen from within, with its quaint little narrow streets, picturesquely primitive, overhung with balconies, it bids you stay for ever. We should call the place a hill-station in India. Little chalets, for the most part two-storied, nestle amid a world of green, each pigeon-house abode higher than its neighbour.

Signakh is fortified, though the once extensive fortifications have a somewhat Earl's Courtian air about them now. The need for them is at an end. But in Schamyl's day—the little place is at the very gate of Daghestan—it was a strongly-held Russian post, whither the country folk of the valleys below were accustomed to retreat when a raid was imminent.

We were entertained at her summer residence by a countrywoman of our own, to whom we had letters of introduction, a lady who was busily solving for herself the benefits or disadvantages—these things depend on the personal point of view—of international marriages, her husband being a Russian holding a Civil appointment. She was as lonely and cut off from her own people as though she lived in Kamchatka, and reminded me of a tiny chip of wood cast up by a mighty river on the banks of a sleepy backwater where the weeds grow a-tangle, and the tall swaying bulrushes hide the light of day. As the little timber fragment lies high and dry, never more to float over swirling rapids, doomed to rot in the sun until the dust is caught up and scattered by the winds, so are some of us thrown by Fate on somnolent hills or forgotten estuaries, and there, unless a

beneficent upheaval floods our Never-Never country,
we stay !

And so—I associate beautiful Signakh with unfulfilled dreams, impossible longings, and castles in the air.

Alas ! cloud palaces are of very little use in these practical days unless one is the possessor of a really navigable air-ship.

CHAPTER VII

ARRIVAL AT THE HUNTING GROUNDS

I p'rythee, shepherd, if that love or gold
Can in this distant place buy entertainment,
Bring us where we may rest ourselves and feed.
As You Like It.

Strangers, and come here by chance.
Love's Labour's Lost.

THE day we left Signakh to climb into Daghestan was, or was not—we could not quite determine—Kenneth's birthday. At home we should have been wishing him "Many happy returns," but the Russian Calendar, twelve days behind ours, said we were premature.

It had rained hard all night, and the beautiful little place gleamed and glittered like a jewel in the dancing sunlight. Across the Alanza an o'erarching rainbow was reflected in the dull-toned plains rolling to the horizon. Ali Ghirik called the glowing belt of prismatic light "the Girdle of the Prophet"—such a poetical synonym, I thought.

The spirit of summer, golden-sandalled, trod the gracious vine-clad slopes, wound in and out the rain-drenched sweet-smelling mulberry trees, and touched with warm glory the snowy peaks which rose here and there from the wall-like frontage of the main chain,

a frontage uniform in solidarity, looking impenetrable, unscalable.

One of our pack mules was ill, and unable to travel, so we had to search for a substitute, and effected an exchange with a dealer of the sect known as the Dukhobors, Russian dissenters, who were exiled to Transcaucasia by the Imperial Government in the reign of Alexander I. For many years they were compelled to keep within a stipulated radius, now one meets them all over. Have we not admitted the Dukhobors to Canada as settlers? It is quite impossible to spell their name correctly. No two English writers render it alike, and every Russian scholar differently. It is understood to be derived from *doukh*, spirit, and *barotsya*, to wrestle, probably because any individual Dukhobor may soulfully wrestle with the Spirit during times of worship.

Just how and wherein they differ from the religious tenets of their forbears, Orthodox churchmen, is rather hard to gather. The Russians don't seem to know or care, and the Dukhobors themselves won't tell. They recognize the omnipotence of no earthly Power—that was one of the reasons which led to their banishment—and subscribe to no outward forms of religion, which they say should be expressed spiritually. To their way of thinking a smoke-stack is just as holy as a church steeple, both being man-made, and nothing holy can emanate from frail humanity. Prayer is shown by deeds, not words, and a belief is general among the sect that the joys of the Hereafter may be gained by worthy members of

any other religious denomination, which in itself argues originality of a very high order. Marriage with them is not a Sacrament. They have the honesty to call it a glorified toss-up, and those people whom God cannot—obviously—have joined, the Dukhobors do not try and gyve together. Love is the fulfilling of the law—Nature's primitive statute. Well, we are great on that in England. And when it becomes a man's first maxim instead of being, as at present, his last, we shall all, Dukhobors and the rest of us, get the millennium.

Every Dukhobor possesses the pioneer turn of mind, unlike the average lower-class Russian, and in their thrifty hands agriculture is raised to an art. Their Orthodox brethren will tell you that the Dukhobors were a finer people when they were perpetually waging moral battles for their beliefs, and have it that the tenets of the sect are considerably slacker than in the days of suspicion and distrust which followed on their banishment. This is as may be. Prosperity, the world over, is very like matrimony; it doesn't suit everybody.

Where the world's way joined a lonesome shepherds' track we came on a last outpost duchar, which suggested mild refreshment. The proprietor gave Ali to understand that he was much too ill to be troubled with us, and if we wanted anything we must get it for ourselves. Excellent red wine he had, indicating by a jerk of his thumb in what direction the treasure lay, but it was expensive, everything was expensive, how else should it be?

We explored the recesses of the place, and in a fusty corner, sunk to its neck in the earth floor, we found a vast pottery jug similar to those we had seen in the vineyards of Kakheti. Ali produced from a rubbish heap a long-handled scoop with string attachment, which we carefully let down into the depths below. It was most exciting, this fishing in a kufskin, like the mysterious delights of a bazaar lucky-tub at home magnified a thousandfold. We hooked up all sorts of oddments. Bits of cloth and quaint little thread buttons, egg-shells, and, most wonderful find of all, a ring of iron with five spiked teeth set round it,—a dread implement which our servant said was always worn in olden days on the right thumb by the Khevsur tribe, who did great execution on the faces of their enemies with it.

Kenneth, tired of collecting relics, nothing daunted, would drink of the residue! He said it was excellent, and free of the naphtha taste which permeates all wine stored in the skin “bottles.”

There was nothing in the duchan to be purchased. Far from its proprietor being able to supply us with necessaries, we—in all humanity—had to contribute to his comfort from our meagre stock.

By the end of a big day we were over the frontier of Daghestan, not a very rough Daghestan as yet, but grim and grey enough. Travelling, as we purposely did, off the better-known tracks reduced our chances of meeting anyone. When we wished to make a halt for the night we found that Yakimo and his mules, loaded with our tents and sleeping kit generally, had lost

themselves and were nowhere to be seen. Neither could we hear the tinkle of the vibrant bell.

We waited for an hour or more, still—no Yakimo, who had travelled in our wake up to the last three or four miles of the journey.

Things began to look awkward, as rain fell heavily, and there was no shelter in the surrounding rocks. Riding on a little, after turning a sharp corner, we came on a shepherd with the traditional crook in a henna-stained hand, sitting on a heap of stones by the wayside, if, indeed, the rough track could be called a "way" at all. He stood up in his surprise at seeing us, and pulled his scanty toga of half-cured sheepskin around him, as though to hide the time-worn skeleton framework beneath.

Shelter he had none, but he seemed very happy. Nature never meant money to make happiness. That's why I love her. Unnatural civilization has done it. The worst of it is we've got to be civilized whether we like it or not.

A neck-end of mutton, lying on the stones, was proffered to us with the great-hearted hospitality peculiar to the shepherds of the Caucasus, who think that kindness shown to strangers is returned a hundredfold in prosperity to the flocks.

Next our acquaintance, made rich in spite of himself beyond the dreams of his simple avarice, aided us to greater comfort for the night. A wine-shop of sorts lay a mile westward, on a trading channel which linked up two villages, and thither we set off, our shepherd for guide, walking our horses, with the rain

pelting down and a murmur of thunder in the air. Darkness fell suddenly. One instant it was light enough to see, the next a pall-like gloom hid us from each other, and nothing but the scrunch of hoofs on the stones told us of the exact proximity of the following horse in the file. Each of us was a perambulating Whiteley, and from his Universal Provider Ali detached a lantern, which he lighted and gave to our herdsman to carry ahead of us. Pursuing this flickering will-o'-the-wisp, we stumbled on until a small square two-storied stone house faced us, all alone, dark and dreary.

A tap at the door, and out popped a gigantic Lesghian, with the promptitude of a penny-in-the-slot machine. High above his head he held a flaming torch, and the lurid glare gave the man's eagle features a wild rough beauty almost unearthly. He stood on the topmost step of a deeply excavated evil-smelling stable, which constituted the cavernous ground-floor of the domicile, and through the Augean depths we were expected to wade to a ladder, by which we gained the comparative comfort of an apartment above, into which we bobbed up, suddenly, rather like seals in the ice.

In the grimy recesses of this place we arranged to pass the night, a very mixed entertainment, as, unless we allowed Kenneth a corner, he would have to repose on the road in the drenching downpour, or sample the unutterable horrors of the regions below. One gets serenely callous to conventionalities in the Caucasus. And it must not be forgotten that, as a general rule,

you cannot make even the one primitive apartment of a wild hostelry your very own. Other chance wayfarers may be precipitated into it at any minute.

We manœuvred a very excellent supper from some of the gift mutton, and the proprietor of the *auberge*—a most attentive individual, who never left us or forsook us—had somehow or other hooked a large trout at a remote stage of its career, which he had kippered after the fashion of smoked salmon. This petrified treasure he bestowed on us, and we cooked it in sections in the frying-pan portion of our *en route* lunch basket. The blowing out of the flaming wick gave our host untold joy. Over and over again he lighted it for the sheer delight of extinguishing the thing.

After the meal he produced some stuff he called—at least so Ali translated the word—“brandy,” fire-water of the fiercest description, masquerading in an attractive bottle, labelled “Finest French Cognac.”

The voice was the voice of Jacob, but the hand was the hand of Esau!

Kenneth was most frightfully ill all night, and made his will on the back of an envelope, which I promptly lost in the rubbish of the room, or else the local vermin ate it. I could not find any more paper, so Kenneth decided on trying to live until he got into a will-making radius again, and presently he fell asleep.

Early in the morning I descended the ladder and found our henchman reposing on some straw in the filthy subterranean stable where the ponies stood fetlock-deep in slush, chumping the “oats” of the country happily.

Yakimo had arrived—directed to us by the faithful shepherd of the evening before, and when I saw the lost one I hadn't the heart to upbraid him, he was so wet and forlorn, having been at large all night. Some natives would have had the sense to erect one of the tents and creep into it, but of such people clearly Yakimo was not one.

Elizabeth Lazenby provided breakfast. Why, I wonder, is there no statue to Elizabeth? There are memorials of so many less beneficent persons.

Then we mounted our ponies again, and set forth, keeping Yakimo well in sight this time, over boulders big as coal-boxes, through continuous dark defiles where the sun's rays never penetrated and a species of damp, tentacled fungi covered the rocks, frieze-like, over our heads.

Game was *non est* as yet. No signs of their passing met our eyes, and we searched each corrie with the telescope.

A good-sized tomb, piled with high stones, had some broken horns of tûr and chamois laid upon the apex, offerings, I suppose, to some well-graced hunter. Two black vipers, sunning themselves, flickered into safety beneath the weather-worn skulls. Farther on we saw a pale grey scorpion, whose sting, our servant told us, is about as bad as that of a horse-fly, whilst that of the black viper endangers life.

We followed a glacier stream, milky white, for some way, until it tumbled over a precipice and eluded us. By lying flat on a rock at its edge we could see in a deep hollow far, far below a village of little square houses,



PLOUGHING WITH TWELVE OXEN

set against the sheer granite wall of the mountain. Patches of cultivated ground clung to the hill-sides, entirely manufactured gardens, to which all the earth must have been laboriously carried.

I always thought that the Manx nation tilled the steepest slopes possible, but the Caucasian ploughman goes one better. With the most primitive implement in the world, so heavy that it takes twelve or sixteen oxen to drag it, he slowly carves the almost perpendicular cliff-side into furrows.

Strange that a people prehistoric enough to use archaic ploughs and such obsolete methods of corn-grinding should yet show such artistic tastes in other directions. Much of the exquisite silver work in the Bazaar at Tiflis is fashioned in Daghestan. These people love beautiful things, without knowing why, and the majority could do a bit of thinking on their own account if they tried.

That Cecily and I might not trouble to fag down in case the place was impossible—we wanted to buy some food for the horses and mules—Kenneth and our servant set off, by devious paths and winding ways, to prospect, acting in such a covert, suspicious fashion as to draw the attention of the entire village. They stalked the place as though it were an antelope. From insignificant bushes they crept to projecting rocks, round which they peered mysteriously, jerking back in absurdly provocative style when observed.

Of course it was not long before the Yuzbashi, or Headman, of the settlement pounced upon them, and the explanations offered only served to make

things worse. We must produce our "papers," and give an account of ourselves generally.

All the permits and passports, together with a gigantic talisman with dangling red seals, were laid out on the plateau for inspection, and the masculine part of the community came to the exhibition. The Yuzbashi, on hands and knees, said he didn't care for any of them, that he couldn't find a single paper viséd for Daghestan, and, even if they were, why did we wish to come, and how was he to know whether Russia was at peace with Germany. This seemed to us more or less immaterial until we gathered from Ali's interpretation that the Headman thought England, a place of which he had only heard dimly, was a Teutonic province. Shade of *The Daily Mail*!

Yuzbashi is a Tatar word, and means "Head of a hundred." Very often there are nothing like a hundred fighting men in a village to be head over, but that cannot be helped. He would be head of a hundred if so many were forthcoming.

It was very disconcerting about the "papers," until Kenneth suddenly extracted from his pocket-book the remnants of a receipted bill from Gunters, headed by a magnificent gold embossed heraldic design. In an instant the Yuzbashi had seized it, and clasping it joyfully in his stained hand held it aloft for all to see.

"This," he said, and Ali translated—"This valuable paper is worth all the rest. Take great care of it, take the greatest care of it, for wherever you go it will ensure you attention and respect. Now I know that I do well to bid you welcome."

He had a rough way with him, this untutored stalwart, but as soon as he was satisfied of our peaceful—if somewhat enigmatical—intentions was not only desirous, but wild to show us kindness and hospitality.

Now we began to realize something of Ali's value. As an interpreter he was really wonderful, and patient beyond words to describe. He told us that Lesghian and English would be very difficult to intertranslate, Lesghian being a high-class language easily confounded!

We left Yakimo in charge of our beasts, and the tattered aristocrats of the mountains guided us down the ledges to the door of our host's house, scrutinizing us all the way. It is a very noticeable trait in these men of the hills as opposed to those of the plains, this habit of taking one in from head to foot. They will not meet a straight look in the eyes, and if for a moment they catch and hold your glance, it disconcerts them frightfully. At first I thought this characteristic untrustworthy, but at last I knew it to be the Daghestan idea of good breeding.

The house was two-storied, like our domicile of the night before, but cleaner, larger, and with verandahs to each story. In the ground-floor apartment were comfortable divans, and a frayed carpet lay in the centre, humming quietly to itself.

In a sort of lean-to lived the surplus wives of the Yuzbashi. Of course, in a Mahommedan country one does not expect to see much of the womenfolk, but the belles here were not all veiled and by no means living purdah. Some were quite unveiled, others covered

their faces to their eyes in nondescript coverings. The veiled ones had it, for there are possibilities in invisibility, and the actuality was rudely realistic. They all wore pyjama-like trousers, some tight, some loose, tied in at the ankles. Top wrappings were in layers, or else of bolster plainness, as the whim seized the wearer. In wilder places we met both men and women clad in primitive toga-ropes of very "nifty" sheepskin, and this levelling kit made it difficult to sort out t'other from which.

Water in a wooden bowl was solemnly brought to us by a handsome youth, whose eyes never left us, so interested was he. We thought it was a drink offering, and I was just stooping to swallow some of the rather dirty liquid in obedience to—as we thought—local custom, when Ali whispered warningly "Wa-ash!" Only just in time! We immersed our fingers and, soapless, affected to clear away the dust of travel. Towels were not. Time dried us. Next our Yuzbashi had a vigorous go at the bowl, bobbing his head in rather like a duck and splashing gaily.

A feast of boiled mutton served on a large flat loaf made from barley meal, into which the husks were ground, appeared. Carefully the Yuzbashi picked out the largest and the fattest morsels and handed the dripping portions to each of us in his fingers. Not to be outdone in politeness we received them on the flat of our hands. We ate alone. Like Shylock, our host would talk with us, walk with us, and so following, but he would not eat with us, drink with us, or pray with us.

The mutton disposed of, inwardly and outwardly, we sounded the Yuzbashi on the game question. It was quite hopeless. He never went after tûr, he said. Nobody in his village did. There was no good fat on a tûr, and of what use were the horns? We were so flabbergasted, we had no answer ready for him.

Ah, well! There are men at home—but, of course, they are of the Uninitiated—who can look at the brownish head of a Caucasian ibex with its massive cylindrical horns sweeping royally outwards and backwards, somewhat like those of the bharal, without seeing anything but—a brownish head hanging on the wall. Others there are—and these are the Understanding ones—to whom the sight of the scimitar curves means the lifting of the arras which divides the workaday world from a dream country of little ledges, gained by tortuous ways, high as eagles' eyries among the cloud banks, where black chasms narrow to nothingness below.

Another glance at the exquisite head and . . . Grey rocky walls rise to the sky, and about the lofty summits snow-clouds circle like the crowns of throned kings. . . . Two snow-partridges cower low on a pinnacled shelf as a lammergeyer, brushing the face of the cloven precipice in majestic flight, returns greeting to them. . . . Little brownish dots spring nimbly from point to point, in tricky darts, light as thistle-down. . . . They come nearer, nearer yet. . . . From the distant valley a silver mist of rain sweeps upward like a spectral host. . . . Hold it back, kind Fate, until, until . . . The moving dots again. . . . The sun strikes the

round keel of weighty horns. . . . Was ever such a pair of horns? . . .

"A fine head," interrupts the Uninitiated, breaking the weft. "What did you say you call it?"

And of such was our Yuzbashi. The stalking of ibex did not attract, or draw, or hold him. He knew nothing of its magnetism, its more than magnetism. Magnets lose their power, and I can't imagine the pursuit of ibex ever doing that. It is the North Point of Sport.

His knowing nothing of the game conditions didn't argue that there were no ibex in the region, for our new acquaintance was the most illiterate specimen of humanity we met in Daghestan. The wilderness has a way of making scholars of us all; the Great Teacher is insistent there. But here, to one of its own children, the Mysterious Tongue had spoken in vain, and the subtle atmosphere had evoked nothing but an ignorance deep as death.

Silent and uncommunicative the iron races of the mountains must appear to "the gentler genius of the plain," but this Yuzbashi was not of the usual quiet knowledgeable variety. He did not even know who made him head of his hundred, and was in a haze of doubt as to which of the world's monarchs he owed fealty to. I couldn't guess his age. How can one solve the mystery of the years which have shaven instead of whitened a head, or guess the colour a dyed beard would turn if introduced to soap and water? Ali Ghirik said the ignoramus was about seventy, but it is a stupid custom this counting the age by years, for

some men have lived a lifetime in a day, and some have never lived at all.

We christened our host "The Crocodile," after the famous animal of Mr. Barrie's creating, for just as that fascinating saurian gave warning of its approach by the ticking of a long-ago swallowed clock, so our friend announced his presence by the loud tick-ticking of a good-sized timepiece which he carried somewhere in the folds of his tscherkesska. It was an ordinary "Made in Germany" alarm, and occasionally "went off" in most disconcerting spasms. The wearer, of course, was quite used to it, and smiled loftily as the unprepared stander-by jumped in astonishment.

We decided on resting our animals for a day or two, the while we tried our luck in the corries around. It looked like tûr country, probably was tûr country.

Our tents were set up on the plateau, and we overhauled the rifles, watched by the entire village, who fought each other for front seats. We had great difficulty in clearing them away when we wanted to go to bed; in fact I don't think they ever did go far off. Argus eyes watched over us all night.

It was just breaking day when I peeped out of the furry folds of my sleeping-bag, and took stock of the weather through the tent flap. Flitting about like out-sized bats were two predatory goshawks, earliest of birds. The hawk tribe are a-wing long ere the eagles think of waking up. Somewhere on the silence a partridge called dismally.

Cecily and I drew lots for companions, and like my luck I drew Ali Ghirik, to whom I scarce could pass the

time of day. All the village saw us start, and "The Crocodile" accompanied us for a little way, riding the best animal I had seen in the country. A magnificent black, which climbed rocks like a cat. Soon our escort left us, choked off by the hard going.

We trudged through a valley a thousand feet deep, with fierce stony hills rising to the sky on either side, following the course of a torrent which raced furiously through the titanic ravine. A slippery grass path, which might have been grown for us, so soft was it to our feet, led on to slopes carpeted by Alpine flora, daisies, and large metallic buttercups, out-sized dandelions too, and gentians of every shade. Above gleamed snowfields, with melting edges streaking down to find the great river below. No signs of habitation—this was the deep, still, strong wilderness itself.

Few solitudes of the world impart such an infinite sense of peace as indefinably comes to one in the heart of mountain valleys, columned by mighty peaks gleaming through an orient vale of clouds. There is such an indescribable sense of space in the limitless vastness, such amplitude for immortal faiths and fancies, beauties and beliefs. Almost I think the best of these things are bred in the wild gardens of the earth, and the silences and the shadows nurture them.

A big snowy owl sat poised on a rock close to us, busily trying to bolt whole a little tailed animal of the weasel tribe. Over and again the bird tried conclusions with his breakfast, until, growing fearful, he flew off in swooping circles, prey half swallowed, and a long tail swinging from his beak. When I was able to question



TYPICAL TŪR COUNTRY

Ali about it, he told me that the snow owls are day feeders, and do all their hunting in the light hours.

Suddenly—a low insistent soft trumpeting on the snow fields high over our heads. Ibex !

Everything was propitious, weather, and—most variable of all—Ali's temper.

An infinitesimal mountain tarn, frozen at its edges, glittered in the sun, and round this we skirted to enter a defile of massive granite rocks, shaped like prehistoric animals. This dreary place converged on a magnificent plateau, set above a series of saddle-shaped ridges stretching away to the horizon,—typical tûr country.

Spying out the land carefully, my glass showed me four or five animated specks on a far ridge, and one—Ye Gods !—on the nearest.

The wind of this altitude being momentarily in our favour gave me the chance of a successful stalk, which should land me on the shoulder of the ridge well above my quarry. Dream stalks are always so adroitly managed !

I took my rifle from Ali, and set off on a long series of crawls and rests and squirms and wriggles round the neck of land which linked up the saddle eminence with the plateau. Ali followed me closely, far too closely, but he would not notice my signals, and I couldn't make him understand me even if it had been wise to try.

Just as I got almost within range, and I knelt to take my bearings, the tûr began to move, but unconcernedly. He halted again, and then sprang to a

little pinnacle, where for an instant the grand old buck squatted on his haunches like a dog, just as the chamois is said to do. There he sat, unmistakably on his haunches, profile on, head thrust forward and horns back, nonchalant as you please, presenting the most ludicrous aspect. Presently he set to work nosing among the stones for the mossy plant beloved of his tribe, and I crept a bit forrader, until at last I had him well within range. Was ever such an easy shot! The veriest tyro must have brought it off. Kneeling, I got up my rifle and—missed by that hair which old Omar says “divides the false and true.”

Off went the old buck on the instant, like a stone from a catapult. Chagrined beyond the telling, I thought out the manner of my failure. As I pulled off I thought I had to contend with an unexplainable resistance about my shoulder. Its tenseness seemed uncontrollable, it might have been someone else's shoulder borrowed for the morning.

Ali Ghirik had been “steadying” me by the flat of his hand!

I couldn't “thank” him as I should have done had our language been the same. All I could do was to express a small portion of my feelings in one *multum in parvo* word, for on such heartrending occasions the Immortal One's directions about giving thoughts no tongue must be regarded. Besides, however I may try, I hardly ever say nothing, but I endeavour to lay the Bard's next injunction to heart: “Nor any unconsidered thought his act.”

Well, the tûr was gone, and the ravines thoroughly aroused.

I soon discovered that Ali Ghirik was no sort of a shikári, and had no notion of how to stalk game, of the lie of land, or the ways of the wind. He was, nevertheless, keen as mustard, and a great stickler for the science of sport, for a set system of tactics. There was always a precise moment for firing, and it came, he said, when you were nicely and comfortably ready and settled down to the job. When else should it come? If there was nothing left by that time to fire at it was unfortunate, but at least the science of the thing had been observed. He was like M. Jourdain, with whom correctness in fencing was an obsession, and his: "You had no business to hit me then. You must never thrust in carte until you have thrust in tierce."

There are such myriads of people who, as a sportsman wittily put it, "cherish the delusion that in rifle shooting all you need is the grip of the village blacksmith to hold the weapon steady, and perfect visual powers to enable you to align your sights correctly on the animal."

It was beyond the ken of our henchman's limited understanding to regard a rifle as almost an organism of whims and fancies, with quaint ways and artful humours. Allah forbid! That would be impious.

We saw no more game for the rest of that unlucky day. Nuff sed!

My cousins fared much better. Cecily bagged a good tûr with really topping horns, thirty-two inches on the outer curve, and eleven in girth. Kenneth

shot an indifferent doe, which, unfortunately for the animal, had passed itself off as far more attractive than it really was.

Both the victims were the ibex, or tûr, of the Eastern Caucasus, *Capra Cylindricornis*. *Capra Pallasi* we obtained later in the Kouban district. Their first cousin, the wild goat or Bezoar of Persia, *Capra Ægagrus*, founder of the family of domestic goats, who completes the trio of ibex peculiar to the Caucasus, we never saw. His habitat, the north side of the eastern end of the great range, was a far cry from us. This fine game animal is the obliging creature whose "Little Mary" provides the calculous concretion known as Bezoar, once so much used in the manufacture of medicines, especially as an antidote to poison.

Between the horns of all three it is difficult to choose the finest. It is a case of "How happy could I be with either were t'other dear charmer away." They all rise from the head close together, curve outward and then back, those of the Bezoar being distinguishable by a massive keel irregularly corrugated, whilst the ibex of the East and West Caucasus have cylindrical blackish horns, deeply incised at intervals. The females all carry horns, smoother in contour, darker also, and in body are of lighter build than the rams. The summer coat of all ibex is much redder than the winter pelage of thick brown-grey, and with advancing age the tendency is to grow darker year by year.

Tragedy waited on the heels of our home-coming. "The Crocodile" had been thrown from his horse, and dragged back senseless to the door of his house. It is

so strange that a horse which will bear his rider almost through anything so long as he remains on his back becomes mad with fright when that same weight hangs from his flank. A most unreasoning beast! He cannot understand that the man he is reducing to pulp is the same being who feeds and tends him. He is a long way after the dog in intelligence.

Over the battered body the patriarchs of the village argued the whys and wherefores of the accident. None of them thought of the alarm clock, the clock which was set once too often.

We all did what we could for the poor "Crocodile," and then left him to the wailing ministrations of his wives. He had need of all the air he could get, which wasn't much, as the house was full to its door all night.

By the next morning the Yuzbashi had ceased to draw his laboured breath, and from a dark corner of the ill-smelling lean-to, filched from the stable area, sacred—if aught is really sacred in Daghestan—to clamouring domestic needs, a little thin wail proclaimed the advent of his son and heir. Nature gave as she took. The greatest gap is filled—her changes, too, are all, in the long run, for the better. We have only to search the records of the centuries to see that.

Silently, like the Arabs, we folded our tents, and stole away from the wind-swept plateau whereon the poor Headman had welcomed us but the day before. We were very subdued, and Ali prayed to Mecca overtime, touching his ears nervously. In these wild parts he had to manage without the dais arrangement

thoughtfully provided on the roadside for the good Mahommedan to conduct his devotions upon. Farther back these low platforms were often come across, standing in water if possible, or by the side of a stream. To be happy a Moslem asks that there should be water for his ceremonial ablutions.

CHAPTER VIII

TÛR HUNTING

We four, indeed, confronted were with four in Russian habit,
Love's Labour's Lost.

But what is the sport, Monsieur, that the ladies have lost?
As You Like It.

CECILY bagged a black-cock for the pot, and we ate him for lunch, a very elderly bird, as we realized before we sampled his toughness. The native black-cock gives away his age by his colour, and only attains an ebony hue in his third year; previous to that he is as brown as the hen. We found him up to 8000 feet; winter sees these birds take to the woods and the rhododendron areas.

The imperious ringing call of our own black-cock, carrying for miles across the wastes, is not a vocal accomplishment of the Caucasian cousin. Instead he has a feeble, silly little cry, hopeless and uninspiring, and as he sits on a topmost rock, calling, calling on his wives—the Mormon!—he jumps up and down, stretching his wings in spasmodic shivers. Nor is he so handsome as our home variety, not so glossy or so heavy, and he lacks the showy white feathers beneath the tail.

All the young cocks had left the society of the hens

and went about in bachelor companies, sometimes as many as twenty together, who spread their tails and peacocked on rocky plateaux as though smiling spring lay ahead instead of a grim advancing winter. The hens frequented an Adamless grassy Eden at a much lower level.

I loved to watch the flight of black-game as they plunged, *in medias res*, from the heights, and listen to the Æolian music of their wings. The first downward swoop carries them far out from the hill-side, and then, all suddenly, the idea seems to strike them that they don't know in the least where they are going and it is quite possible they may never get there. Threes about! And every bird curves his neck, and tucks his powerful rudder-like tail low until it reaches the required steering angle, when he races with unerring accuracy right or left to the hill again.

I found black-cock harder to stop than a rocketing pheasant, and if his pinion feathers remained unscathed the glorious bird seemed impervious to shot, of which he took an unbelievable amount without blenching. When hard hit, the bird invariably makes for some familiar resting-place, going gallantly, flying strong, to fall, very often, just as he reaches his sanctuary.

The most sporting game bird of the Caucasus is the big snow-partridge of the high peaks, a splendid creature, almost as big as a capercailzie. He will give you a shoot for your money every time! He is good eating, too, and for once a Russian description, "mountain turkey," fits him like his own feathers. The snow-partridges are remarkable climbers—I wonder if the

spurs worn by the old cocks assist in this alpine work—and I often watched, through my glasses, these birds running Marathon races up the steeps. They scaled precipices with the celerity of a woodpecker on a tree stem, all the while flirting their tail to display to the best advantage the delicacy of the white ruffed lining. The perpendicular was no bar to these alpinists.

They are most difficult to shoot. One so rarely gets a fair and square chance—snow-partridge are shy beyond the telling. Embracing a rock with one arm, trying to get your gun up with the other, the while your feet scratch in loose shale for a wobbling resting-place, gives all the game to the bird, who gets up his fast pace the instant he quits ground, and in a deep curtseying swoop confounds poor oscillating you! As they rise they emit a querulous whistle, which soon merges into a series of short, shrill, penetrating cries, then, as they light on the high peaks, often mist-wrapped, you hear a musical gurgle like the soft rippling of water falling from a narrow-necked bottle.

They are hard to see, because their grey plumage blends so harmoniously with the rocks they rest upon, but in flight are most conspicuous. I noticed a most sportive habit of theirs. As a beam of sun struck through the surrounding vapour many partridges flung themselves into the air for a short turn, flirting their feathers the while, a sort of drying process, I imagine, and these were the moments seized upon by us for murderous attempts. Alas! so often mere attempts, with the rattle of shot on the rocks, and the triumphant gurgle to mock us. If by some lucky chance a bird was

hit, great was the fall thereof. We never secured an undamaged specimen; the nature of the ground was all against it.

By late afternoon we were very worn out with the hard going and so much riding, and Kenneth complained bitterly of the tortures of his saddle. When we begged him, snappily, for we were all rapidly losing our tempers, not to make so much fuss, he asked if one of us would like to try it for herself. I sampled the rack for half an hour and had more than sufficient. The principal discomfort was the short stirrup, which we ought to have had altered before we left Tiflis. The shortness of it prevented the foot taking any of the weight off the saddle.

Natives always ride with the shortest of short stirrups, and as this is the saddle, with very slight modifications, of the finest horsemen in the world, Arabs, Persians, Tatars, Kirghis, Caucasians, we came to the conclusion, as do all suffering travellers, that our bad equestrianism was the fault.

With the shades of night closing in on us, creeping up the slopes like grey ghosts, we found ourselves in a most exposed region. A village Ali remembered, which had lured us on to think of fodder for the ponies and mules, had, by some curious piece of legerdemain, been removed bodily since his time or existed but in his dimming fancy. Even the ubiquitous shepherds were not—we were getting above the lands whereon the cattle pasture. Nothing living was to be seen now, the defiles and hill-sides were silent as the grave.

We seemed in for an exposed bivouac, and were

searching for a bit of flat ground whereon we could erect our tents, and which also presented a few grass spears for the animals, when a great reverberation sounded through the ravine. Another crack, and a bullet ricocheted ominously close to our heads, and struck the cliff face above.

Kenneth shouted protestingly until the echoes jangled, and from far above came a faint answer.

There, on the sky-line, peering down at us over the peak of a gaunt ridge, like a row of decapitated heads, were four sportsmen, out, as we afterwards discovered, after tûr.

The line of heads disappeared, and were so long in reappearing we almost forgot them. Trying to light a fire in a spot where trees grow only in little bushes, sparse at that, and the wind blows a hurricane, makes you forget anything, save how to keep the thing going.

Two Russians rounded a spur of rock, attended by a game-warden and a Lesghian guide, all attired alike in the everlasting tscherkesska, which the Muscovite affects to have found so comfortable. To Kenneth it proved the most impeding and vexatious kit he had ever struggled with, and it took longer to put on, he said, in its various complicated sections, than any other garment yet invented. Having enthusiastically adopted the gear to the extent of leaving his own civilized clothes behind him in Tiflis, he had to dree his weird to its bitter sartorial end.

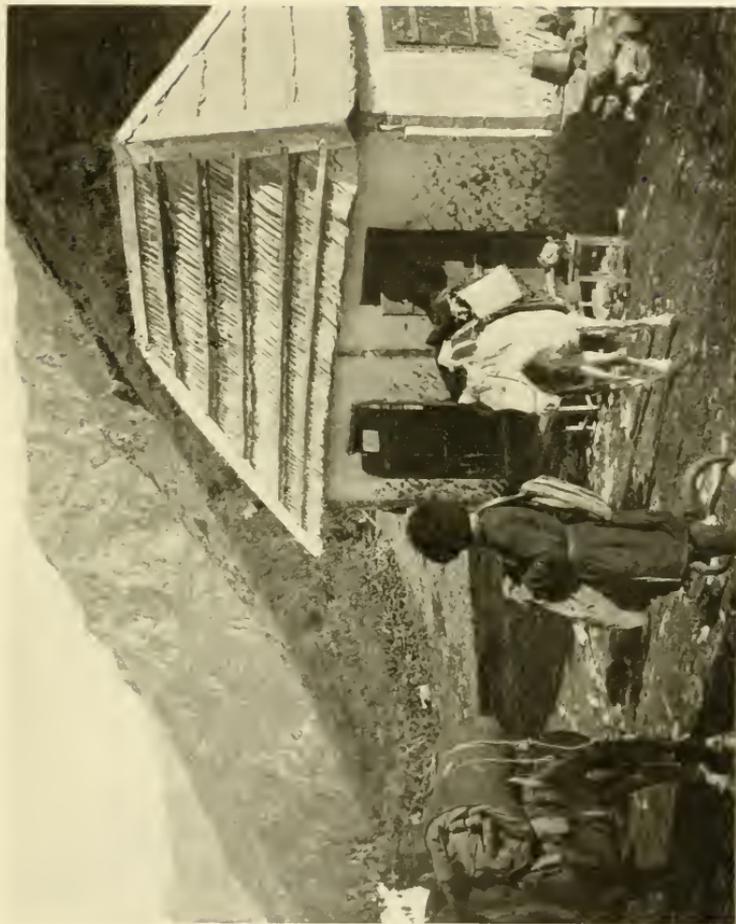
The new-comers evinced no surprise at the sight of us, neither did they explain the bombardment. They took it as the most natural thing in the world to find

three Britishers, one disguised and two ordinary samples, struggling through the passes of Daghestan in company with an antiquated native and a Tatar muleteer. I'm sure I should be very much astonished to meet three Russians, living *alfresco*, in the wilds of Dorset, say, dragging about with a prehistoric collection of goods and chattels, and bestriding ponies hung round with pans and what-not.

As soon as our new acquaintances gathered that we were journeying thus because we liked it, and not because we had to, that Kenneth was a soldier, *jouent le grand rôle* in the Caucasus, and that Cecily and I belonged to the feminine persuasion, a fact at first difficult to realize, because a person enveloped in a *bourka* really might be anything, they were most thoughtfully hospitable, and insisted on our going to their near-by shooting-box, for the night at least.

The Southern Russian who loves sport is said to be a freak. "The chase," one of the oldest Muscovite proverbs tells us, "is worse than slavery." Yet here were two warriors from the distant post of Lagodekki running a little shoot, just as an Englishman would do.

With us at home an invitation to a shooting-box partakes of the pride which apes humility. You know before you set out that "the box" will turn out a baronial establishment where the throngs of servants are only one degree less rapacious than the minions of a frankly-avowed Castle. You understand thoroughly that the suggested inevitable "pot-luck" means the cuisine of an Escoffier. But—in the Caucasus a shooting-box is a box, and doesn't pretend at all.



THE SHOOTING-BOX IN DAGHESTAN

It was the cosiest, quaintest, prettiest place imaginable, and comfortable as could be. Cecily and I accepted the proffered best room—the only room—without compunction, and tents were put up for the evicted owners. There was an excellent stove to keep us warm o' nights, and real beds. A most sybaritic way of chasing tûr.

Every traveller comes home to extol the Russian translation of the word "hospitality." In our case it broke all records. Not only did our sportsmen acquaintances give us the freedom of their hut and rations, but they insisted on introducing us to the best tûr corries of the district, and the most generous of shikâris is apt to freeze up a little if you touch him on the subject of his own pet hunting grounds. They were even interested in Kenneth's jungle stories—the very subtlest form of hospitality—and listened patiently to the difficulties he overcame when he shot his snow leopard in Tibet, why he didn't bag that serow, and how the yâk tried to bite him.

We had fried trout for breakfast, trout which had lain all night on a shelf in our room, like loved relics. I don't know how long they had been stored up, but their little faces were quite blue, and their general appearance was somewhat time-worn. Shisliks of mutton there were also, done to a turn by a wiry Cossack cook; weak tea, piled high with sugar, Russian-fashion, and the wine of Kakheti for those who could face it so early in the morning. A delightful meal, with the sun getting up, and the mists tip-toeing up the slopes, like fluffy white coryphées.

I was to go out a-shooting with the tall, thin Muscovite, and Cecily with the podgy small one. It was all very well for her, because she could make herself understood, and my good-looking cavalier had to be dumb with me. Perhaps as well—tûr stalking. But then there's the getting to the ibex ground, not to mention the coming back.

Our trusting belief, evolved from the traditional schoolroom myth, that all Russians speak numerous languages, and often English, fluently, was destined to be smashed to atoms. A few much-travelled and highly cultivated Russians are linguists, but the average officer—bucolic, very—speaks nothing but his own tongue, and takes care to learn no other. The general idea in the Caucasus appears to be that that cradle of languages has been rocked quite long enough, and as they refuse to learn any of the tribal dialects the conquerors are fast making Russian the *lingua franca* of the whole country. The educated Georgian studies English to a great extent, and this, I think, because a knowledge of it gives him the key to the locked treasure-house of our great poets, whose works must otherwise remain, as the greatest of all poets hath it, "shapes of local habitation and a name."

My attendant, I could see, regarded Cecily's and my sporting predilections with ill-concealed amusement. I am so very used to that, and it has ceased to trouble me. Time was!

I don't know why a woman should be considered on sight to be unable to shoot as straight as a man, or stalk so well, or play the game, or understand the ways of

jungly creatures. But she isn't. I once ruefully remarked on this in the hearing of a notable suffragette.

"Wait!" she said darkly. "Wait until we get Votes for Women!"

But of these halcyon future times, affecting the aspect of so many things, even big game shooting, my Russian knew nothing. He had only unnecessary doubts of me and admiration for my rifle. Altogether the wrong way about. As a matter of fact, I ought to have doubted the Russian's prowess, not he mine, for he had extolled his skill, my cousins told me, to the skies, and claimed the honour of being the finest sporting shot in the Caucasus. This looked very suspicious. The very fact of asseverating implies mistrust of one's capabilities. It is done not only to cajole others, but oneself. The best men never asseverate. There is no need.

In case you are contemplating a shooting trip with a Russian for companion, I must tell you that our unwritten law of "first blood" does not obtain in the Muscovite code. The prize is not to him who draws first blood, but to the sportsman who manages to get in the final shot. The last phase, therefore, is often spiced with most untoward happenings. Go warily!

We set off, my warrior and I, taking no servant with us, through a tract of small timber which retarded us woefully, as there were no "trapinkas," or game trails, threading the density. After a half-mile or so of this, we emerged on a steep rock-strewn slope, where the trees thinned out into ones and twos, and tall waving grasses grew a-riot.

High above us on a shelf-like ledge a small brown bear faced us coolly, for all the world as though he had been waiting weary hours to meet us. He was certainly not more than eighty yards off, but bear pelts in August are hardly worth the taking. Our little friend of the patchy coat, long in places, short in others, evidently knew we had no need of his inferior covering, for he continued to glare at us, grumbling to himself. Then, with a deep-toned "Wouf!" he shambled off with plantigrade steps to a wilderness of stones in his rear.

There are two species of bears in the Caucasus, the ordinary brown, who lives almost anywhere in timbered regions, and is in some parts really plentiful, and the brown-grey of the mountain tops, a creature of altitudes and snow.

The natives say that Bruin of the grey coat is a much more dangerous beast, more treacherous, than the quaint brown "Michael Michaelovitch," as they affectionately term him, and round the latter they weave enough romances and folk-lore yarns to fill a book.

The brown is bigger than the grey, who makes up for size by differences in temper. Owing to the conditions under which he must be stalked, he is a somewhat rare trophy; the natives themselves only tackle him from above, when the beast hasn't the foggiest chance. On level ground they never try conclusions.

As we climbed, the scenery grew grander and grander, fiercer and more forbidding. Vast ravines yawned on every side, their tops patched with snow, and through



THROUGH THE MISTS PENNACLED HEIGHTS GLEAMED AND GLITTERED

the mists pinnacled heights gleamed and glittered in the sun.

Spying out the land with my telescope I saw a far-away ridge on which some moving dots were feeding. Ibex, from their size. I counted six or seven, but at that distance it was impossible to tell whether they carried good heads or not. Between us ranged a trio of chamois, with a carefully-posted sentinel.

After a series of dumb-show explanations we decided on a big *détour*, which should bring us round well to windward. This jaunt took us the best part of three hours, as the going was exceedingly difficult, in parts almost unscalable. We were so long in negotiating and avoiding these tracts that on reaching the place of the tûr, no tûr were to be seen.

Through more ravines and rock-strewn valleys we pertinaciously stumbled, stopping to lunch on mutton sandwiches at the foot of a gigantic cliff, where high over our heads we saw several tûr gazing down at us disdainfully. They felt themselves to be what they were, safe from our rifles. Their fortress was impregnable. We could hear them softly trumpeting, as is their way when disturbed.

I managed to make my companion understand that I had had about enough walking for one day, and we turned campwards, but by another route to the one upon which we climbed to this roof of the world. Going laggingly down a shale slope, feeling the weight of my Mannlicher at last, my warrior picked out, with the eye of a hawk, four ibex feeding far below us, ibex who were evidently searching about for a suitable

place in which to sleep awhile. Presently they all lay down, unconcernedly, in the shadow of an overhanging rock, probably a thousand feet from us.

A stalk of this kind is a stalk to live for. It brings into play all the skill, finesse, and knowledge a shikári can lay hold of, and more than that.

We had our rifles in slings, and therefore our much-needed hands were free to play their part in the great drama. We embarked on a tooth and nail descent, and though it seemed to me that I made noise enough to wake a hibernating bear, the tûr showed no uneasiness. Presently we lost sight of them altogether, the great shadowing rock shielded them. We could do nothing but keep on moving downwards and hope and hope, and pray to Diana, who of all the Immortals best loves a hunter, to aid us.

The plateau top of the rock beneath which the ibex unconsciously drowsed away the danger-filled minutes was our goal, and a difficult spot to reach. A sheer drop of perhaps eight feet separated us from this Mecca—to be beaten on the last stage!

Silently and adroitly my Russian friend slipped off his heavy tscherkesska—being still, this for Madam Grundy, sartorially passable in the next layer!—and threw the coat to the ground beneath, thus ensuring a quiet landing-placæ. I dropped first, and made no noise at all, but my rifle gave a gentle remembrance as it swung in its sling. The big Muscovite was not so silent, but then, there was so much of him! We smiled congratulations at each other, and crept on, like Fenimore Cooper's Indians on the war path.

The excitement of this phase! Would the tûr be still resting, or should we face a scene of emptiness!

Reaching the edge of the little abyss we peered over anxiously. Joy! Underneath, quite one hundred and seventy feet below, were three, four tûr. Most awkwardly placed—a shot would need to be taken almost on the perpendicular. It really wasn't the moment for picking the best head, because only one head of any kind came within the zone of fire, unless I fell over and joined the creatures.

I signed to my companion that I wished him to there and then resign any ideas he was harbouring of doing a bit on his own, and to hang on to my coat for all he was worth. He gripped me like a vice round the waist, and very skilfully too, for I had ample room to take most careful aim. His "steadying" was very different from Ali Ghirik's. This shikári had certainly been out a time or two before.

I fired, a most difficult shot, and the bullet whizzed over the back of my quarry. Like brown gnomes, many tûr skipped from hiding-places in the rocks. The grip on my waist never relaxed—a splendid lever. I got a grand chance at a magnificent old ram as he hesitated and so was lost. I hit him fair and square, but off he went, for not once in fifty times does an ibex drop to the shot. I followed up my success with another shot, and this time he lurched forward, then righted himself and passed with his kind out of sight.

I turned to my unselfish cavalier, whose face was crimson with the exertion of nailing me to the precipice

edge, and his eagle eye took in the situation with a hunter's quick perception.

"We must find my ram!" I cried, in English, forgetting that he did not speak it.

He understood me, for all that. There's a Volapuk for those who go a-shooting.

"Certainly we will find him," was what his reply meant to me. It was given very confidently, and the speaker was all smiles at my enthusiasm.

There was very little choice in a way down. One side of the plateau wall slipped away to nothingness in a series of drops until a dried river bed, cutting the heart of the valley, broke the fall, on the other boulders and knife-edged saddle rocks, between which long-fallen snow lay patchily. Without staying to consider—had we remained to think I doubt if we should have ever started—we took on a performance of an advanced acrobatic order. My Russian did his best for me, but it is hardly the moment for playing *preux chevalier* when poised aloft, klipspringer-wise, on a movable rock which lets you down before you are ready to spring clear. We negotiated the terrible place at last, after I had wrenched my shoulder and the Russian had cut his cheek by a cruel point upon which he impaled himself after a toss.

"For my sake," I said, still in English, "let us have a good rest."

He quite understood and sank down with a sigh of relief. Then we overhauled our rifles—such scratches! It was pitiable, but then—we were scratched, too. I tried staunching my companion's wounded cheek with



A FINE TÛR

bits of frozen snow, which was all I could think of. He winced as I applied the chilly dressing, but it was very effectual.

On again, after my tûr. Across a steep slope, sparsely covered with snow which showed the prodigious jumps of the flying ibex, we tracked our quarry, following closely one continuing trail, a lagging one with all the darts and springs left out. Every heavy footstep told how hard hit he was, and how spent.

With a rush and a rattle of stones an ibex doe and a very small kid got up from a hollow to our right, and we watched them dash off across the broken country as though it was park land. The kid was surprisingly agile for so small a mite, and took gigantic jumps into the air, tossing its charming head, kicking out its long legs all at once when at the height of its leap.

In a wild amphitheatre of grey piled rocks we came on the tûr—quite dead. His feet were tucked under him as though his last leap were yet to be taken, his beautiful head drooped with the weight of the splendid horns. A prize, indeed! Quickly I got out my tape and ran it over the curves. Thirty-five inches, with a span of twenty-two, and a girth of twelve and a half. I measured carefully afresh. Still the same result.

The Russian seemed very delighted also, for he rested congratulatory hands on my shoulders and looked so affectionately proud of me that I thought it wiser to damp his enthusiasm a little by suggesting his carrying home the prize. A bit of a facer, for, whole, my tûr was a fairy of some fourteen stone, I daresay.

This idea certainly drove all others out of my

friend's head. He tried to make me understand the impossibility of my behest, and, lest I should insist, hurriedly started to work decapitating the prize. Well, the head and toll of the nimble feet contented me, for the summer coat was in an ugly state of transition, neither short nor long, bare and long-haired in patches.

Overhead the snow eagles wheeled slowly round and round against a darkening sky. There is something so ruthless in their purposeful flight, something wildly lonely and grand and very aloof. The great birds were still high in the clouds as the scene of their banquet-to-be faded from our view. There was no hurry, such as the Vulturidæ display.

We made the shooting-box as night fell and supper—thanks be!—was imminent. Cecily and her sportsman were still at large. Kenneth had a chamois with a freak right horn, and had also bagged a good tûr which fell over a precipice and was irrecoverable. He said it was a record head. 'Tis ever thus. The records always fall over the cliffs, and the mediocre animals remain to face the tape.

My friend told Kenneth of our glorious hunting day, but stopped off at the wave of enthusiasm. I told that part myself. My cousin said, "Quaint people, these foreigners! Now, an Englishman under similar circumstances would have behaved very differently."

And from my own experience I am inclined to agree with him. But—I must not forget. Kenneth only surmised from books—being a Scotchman himself.

We got rather anxious about Cecily, who didn't return until nearly midnight, after a blank day. They

had seen a fair amount of game, but only got one good chance, in the taking of which my cousin nearly lost her life through the methods of her escort, who was, she said, the most dangerous shot she had ever had the ill-luck to encounter, and who, apparently, evolved his own rules.

When on a slope, walking side by side, with about thirty paces between them, an ibex suddenly got up on Cecily's right, and without any ado the Russian blazed away across the line, almost bagging his astonished companion, who instinctively threw herself back. But for the backward movement Cecily declared that she must have got the benefit of the bullet. The small shikári even missed the tûr !

We discovered later that he was the veriest tyro, which just shows how idiotic it is to go out hunting with strangers of whose skill and capacity you know nothing. Fortunately there is a benign Providence which looks after women who take on pastimes or duties of a more or less dangerous nature—a far more potent Providence than that which is responsible for the comings and goings of mere man. I've always noticed this curious fact, and presumed on it, as all femininity does instinctively. A woman cyclist, for instance, never thinks of overhauling her machine from year's end to year's end. Once put together, always stay together, is her idea of machinery of any sort. Fearlessly, day after day, she hurls herself down the most terrific hills, with every nut and screw loose and hanging by threads, and yet the thing holds and never gives her a single toss. If there is an accident, it

does not happen through the component parts of the bicycle slipping their moorings.

But let a man run affairs on this happy-go-lucky method! His machine would be scrap iron in two two's, and himself in hospital. Clearly the earthly "One law for the woman and another for the man" has its inverted counterpart on the Olympian heights where the Providences have their dwelling-place.

The next excitement of any moment was provided by Yakimo, who managed to get himself stung in the wrist by a species of viper which was all too plentiful in the rocks. The muleteer was hunting for scrub brushes to keep our fire alight when the catastrophe overtook him, so that under the Compensation Act of the wild we owed him all the care and attention we could muster, which wasn't much.

Yakimo said that the viper struck at him backwards, or the accident would not have occurred. The mistaken reputation of the reptile had travelled thus far! It was not much use to explain that vipers only *seem* to strike rearwards. They have to throw their heads back to an acute angle ere the hinged fangs can lunge forward. With two little punctures in his swarthy wrist, our man had all the first-hand knowledge of Natural History he wanted.

For a few minutes after his announcement chaos reigned. Everyone suggested remedies and nobody carried one into effect. Then I bethought me of the manner in which rattlesnake bites were treated in a mining camp in Montana, where I once sojourned for some weary months. It was near a river whose

marshy sides harboured many of these fearsome creatures, and often a too enthusiastic fisherman paid a heavy toll for the trout filched from the danger zone. There a bottle of whisky was considered a sure cure, and, administered in time, the "case" was never hopeless. The particular brand of fire-water used, the only sort available, the beloved of the loggers and miners, was called "Pepper Whisky," from the little grains of black pepper which floated loose in the liquid.

We had none of the efficacious "Pepper" variety, but a substitute was to hand among our stores, and with this we started to fill up Yakimo to the brim, a terrible business, as his religious scruples fought against it and us. We let all that sort of thing go by the board, and, with Ali turned renegade on his co-religionist, held the victim down firmly the while the podgy Russian shikári poured the whisky all over Yakimo and down him. Kenneth said there was such a thing as alcoholic poisoning, and suggested a halt. As though it mattered. Yakimo was poisoned anyway, the particular taint from which he suffered would be of little moment to a man in such a pass.

Kenneth's prescriptions in our own minor ills weren't half so varied as Cecily's and mine. There abode with him these three, pills, opium, and quinine, and the greatest of these was quinine.

And—a big And—quinine in a case of snake-bite is impotent.

How Yakimo breathed when we had finished with him! Such stertorian gasps as though his clothes fitted too tightly. Probably they did! Soon he was

put to bed on a heap of bourkas, and we went at intervals to look at him. The men did also, fearfully, as though they were in the presence of an unclean beast who yet had a strange drawing power. All that night and all next day our patient slept, until at nightfall he raised a fearful head, and complained bitterly of the dark brown taste in his mouth which took almost the river to wash away.

It was a glorious cure, and the viper, I think, was of the order dangerous. For, later, we saw, and killed, its counterpart, a very excellent imitation of a puff adder. Kenneth dissected him, and found the poison gland at the base of the fangs, and the strangest canal down which the deadly secretion ran to the wound.

A disheartening series of blank days ensued, when, stalked we never so wisely, no tûr or chamois or animal larger than a little blunt-headed mouse who lived in the rocks was to be seen. We scaled cliffs, crossed moraines, delved into cavernous ravines, tried moss-grown slopes—all without avail. It was as though an earthquake had swallowed up the creatures of the mountain-tops. Our Russian hosts were in no way perturbed, saying it was often so, but then they could afford to philosophize, having all the time there was. Our minutes had to be counted, and lost days to us were lost indeed.

Somehow or other a parcel of English newspapers filtered through to us, an unsolvable piece of legerdemain. On the last lap they were carried by the Cossack servant attached to our tall thin entertainer, from Lagodekki, whither the man had journeyed for

further food supplies. Mercury must have transported the package thither. Or the marvellous Marconi. What boots it so they came?

All the interesting news items were blacked out by the Censor, but a condemnatory article on the Navy, the Army, the Admiralty, and the War Office was left unblotted—an object-lesson for us, perhaps. But I just skimmed over it. In the wild I'm a student of Nature. There is no room for carping criticism.

In this time of provoking game famine Ali Ghirik had an inspiration, a wonderful and rare thing with him. He suddenly remembered that his father and grandfather talked much of a certain corrie—remote, of course—which was haunted by the finest tûr of all fine tûr. Through the ages this particular rocky fastness had been known to generations of mountain men as the certain resort of ibex—which didn't sound very promising. A well-known hunting-ground is apt to become too popular.

In the majority of cases men who tell you they have a brilliant illumination tread but upon old ground, but that's no reason why a brilliant illumination when it does come should be excluded. We know that it is sometimes worth going through ground again. Coverts are not always blank that have been drawn.

The celebrated corrie worked out on the map at least three days' journey away, going hard too, through forsaken and lonely mountain passes. Kenneth was very much against the wild tûr chase, with perhaps no tûr at the end of it, but he couldn't very well leave us to go alone.

And, talking of maps, it is a most difficult thing to get hold of one of the Caucasus in which the names as marked coincide with the local renderings. In fact, it seemed to us that the occupying Muscovite has rechristened numerous slices of his territory without previously informing the natives of the change. You spot your village or stream or peak, and think you've hit it off all right only to find that the name as told you has small, and often no, relationship with the one to which you have grown in some degree accustomed on the map. Distances are hardly ever correctly estimated. We pinned our faith on to an anglicized ordnance map of sorts, anglicized out of all likeness to the Caucasus, and found in it the substance of things hoped for, as St. Paul said, and the evidence of things not seen.

With ready hospitality our hosts put the resources of their establishment at our disposal. We must have more men—they supplied the lack; more pans—their cuisine furnished us; more ponies to carry extra comforts—their stables were a mere emptiness after we had taken our pick.

We set off for Ali's hunting-ground as the dawn broke grimly in pallid tones of grey and drab. Then across the gloom little spears of light quivered, cutting the shadows in twain, and soon the sky, rosy-clouded, caught the sun-god as he sprang from his couch 'neath the horizon and set him high on his burnished throne, glorious to see.

To be on the mountains of Daghestan as day is breaking is to be a child once more with all those



ON THE MOUNTAINS OF DAGHESTAN AS DAY IS BREAKING

nameless, mysterious, beautiful attractions about one which so rarely come again. The feel of the early air, the scent of the waving grasses, the desire to see the other side of every craggy top is all a part of the childish glamour which lures you on, and calls and calls—it's wonderful! The next rocky ridge, which may be far away, seems so near. The extraordinary clearness of the atmosphere is answerable for this mirage, but you don't think of that. You can hardly restrain your curiosity which prompts you to peep over the other side and see if any tûr are roaming there. And when that is gratified, it is the same with the next up and down.

CHAPTER IX

THE KILLING OF THE GREY BEAR

Thou'dst meet the bear i' the mouth.

King Lear.

You are afraid if you see the bear loose, are you not?

Merry Wives of Windsor.

IN England it would have been September 13th, but the opposition calendar of Russia was still wrestling with the month of August, or just getting over it, and I hoped the confusion would paralyse the fatal potency of my unlucky number.

Ali Ghirik, like a homing pigeon, led us straight to the place of his fathers. We went miles out of our course, but he was not to be gainsaid. After the manner of the Chinese, our servant called the entire community, from the oldest patriarch to the newest baby, "cousin."

Our arrival made quite a stir in the settlement, and for a night we set up our tents on the village green, facing a row of rough stone houses, and through the open flap watched the life of the place. It looked bare and frugal and hard, with few graces that I could discover, and they all looked so tragic and sombre in the living of it, like amateur actors in an Æschylean tragedy.

There is an indescribable awe about these fierce,

gaunt mountain villages set in the Daghestan wilderness. Perhaps it is because every inch of land has its chronicle, the sacred chronicle of the war-makers who have gone before.

The women, unveiled and unashamed, did all the work. Was it not enough, demanded the offended Ali, when we remonstrated, that the men carry arms? As though there was any particular hardship in that. The poor feminines had to shoulder weights which really did count.

One poor toiler bumped about for hours on a baulk, or sleigh, of timber studded with flint teeth, towed by a bullock over the roughest of ground upon which corn ears were strewn in a circle. Round and round they trailed, she trying to keep her place on the oscillating perch in her desire to add her weight to the threshing scheme, and the animal going like a clock which needs winding.

Among the fierce dogs of the place, great brutes with deep chests and square, purposeful jaws, a little grey bear cub fought for his place in the world. It was quaintly pathetic to see the back-handed cuffs and protesting snaps with which the ursine atom demanded equal rights in the sharing up of the fearsome offal which lay in smelling heaps in the highways and byways of the houses. Nobody seemed to care for the small creature; indeed, to all intents and purposes, it was free to return to the wild as it listed, but it had eaten of the bread of dependence and drunken of the wine of ease. A land of plenty held it as securely as a den in the Zoo. Next winter the cub would provide

the oil for the lamps and furnish a couple of papaks for the fur market in Tiflis. Poor little creature! Living out a butterfly existence in deep sound sleeps on rotting rubbish heaps, eating, wrangling, playing, and then—the end!

Even in far Daghestan—*Auri sacra fames!*

The Yuzbashi told us how he had obtained the cub with another from a rocky cave about the line of perennial snow, where the old she-bear had denned up for the winter.

In the Caucasus the bears of the high altitudes hibernate early, because of food difficulties and the rigour of the climate. The males often come out during the winter sleep and see how the world is wagging, but once comfortably holed up the female lies *perdu* until spring is well advanced.

The place chosen by the cub's mother for her long drowse was well known to the villagers who marked it down, and before it was thoroughly snowed under they excavated, and with considerable hardihood induced the old bear to come forth to meet a cruel rain of stones which bore her to the frozen earth.

On his head the Yuzbashi wore a fine grey papak. He took it off and handed it to us. "Permit me to introduce you."

Penetrating farther into the cave the hunters found two cubs, quite naked, blind, and about as big as hares. One died, but the other lived and thrived, and fed cheerfully from a skin bottle filled with goat's milk.

All this sounds as though the Daghestani is wont to

treat the ursine inhabitants of the mountain land very cavalierly. The opposite is the case. In this particular instance it is likely that the she-bear hadn't a chance, and was doomed ere she issued from her den.

Poorly armed as they are, and with the inherent respect for the bear tribe peculiar to all those who share their fastnesses with the dangerous arctoids whose exploits are the basis of most wild folk-tales, a native hunter ever endows a bear with a reputation which places the animal in the forefront of all keen-witted, well-armed beasts of prey.

Well, I am not disposed to speak lightly of the reputed formidableness of the Caucasian silver-grey, although I have very little experience of their methods of attack and general cunning—we only came across one specimen in the country. Nobody who has ever faced the magnificent onslaught of a cornered bear battling for its life could write slightly of the bravery of any of the genus.

Down the centre of the stony roadway a procession of sorts passed before our tents, plodding solemnly behind a ragged figure, another of Ali's numerous cousins, who kept up a continuous rat-a-tat-tat on a most ingenious drum made from baked clay, with stretched tops of roughly prepared skin. Everybody carried a nodding branch of pine, a banner worth something in a region where trees are scarce. Birnam Wood had come to Dunsinane.

We took the serenade, like the' self-centred Britishers we were, to be a sort of town's welcome, and were just preparing a comprehensive form of thanks

when our servant took us down several pegs by remarking that none of his clan ever beat a drum to welcome any Frank—they all hated Franks. He himself had only got used to them by going among them in the cities and taking them in quantities, gulping them down, as it were.

After this set-back we rather lost interest in the proceedings and the little crowd trailed away to a burial-ground set on the shoulders of a frowning escarpment, down the sheer face of which Schamyl and his adherents was said to have escaped by a track only known to the mountain men, just as a body of Russians, hot on the scent, thought they had the Caucasian Phoenix in their sparrow-net.

There is something so romantic in the history of Schamyl, so alluringly heroic, that the more you hear of his escapes the more you like it, and even the desolate wastes of Daghestan, crossed by us where hundreds of gallant Russians lie beneath the stones, left us shamefully unmoved.

All one thinks of is Schamyl—Schamyl, whose biographers, like all biographers, have but two views of him. He is either a devil or a demi-god. And the fanatical leader was neither. Just—a man who knew himself. Swift told us that no man ever made an ill figure who understood his own talents, nor a good one who mistook them. The Caucasian hero, more than any other powerful character in the great struggle, illustrated this memorable saying. Schamyl understood his own peculiar abilities. The attributes of a leader, of an actor, were

his. He had the power to sway, to draw, to rule. And he knew it.

My judgment of Schamyl may be wrong, but I do not form my judgments on any matter thoughtlessly. They are based upon the balance of a pair of scales ; possibly ill-adjusted, but still a basis to work on. I know I am ready to alter my judgments if my sense of fact alters, but I cannot alter because someone just says so, and this is where I take issue with all the writers who belittle Schamyl's motives. When a person who knows more than I do says a thing is so, I will accept it only if he gives me solid reason for his deduction. *Iipse dixits* are apt to be biased and do not always bear searching examination ; even those which emanate from men known to be sound in their judgments. No man can be convinced by an *ipse dixit*. Conviction is born of logic and not emotion. Emotion may lead us towards conviction, but cannot itself convince.

We were not permitted to " make friends " with the five wives of the Yuzbashi, who treated us all alike. Because Mahommendan convention forbade Kenneth making his salaams, Cecily and I might not do so either. Ali, seeing our chagrin, explained that his " cousin " was of a jealous disposition, which was, to Cecily and me, no explanation at all. He seemed to think that jealousy in a husband was a trait to apologize for, until we told him that though an Othello-like worser-half might make for awkwardness on occasion, he is at least not so humiliating as the husband who simply doesn't know what jealousy means.

I should have so liked to discover whether or no the wives relished being so many, and whether their affections managed to hang on when they saw the object of them dispensing his own so generously. What a woeful state of things! It would soon cure me. Because it would make me think. And when love stops to think it abates—it looks beyond, and asks what it means.

I wanted to see the system of centuries in operation. If it is all in Nature's scheme it must be perfect. And yet—Nature has undoubtedly worked out with her marvellous wisdom that mankind to flourish must not breed promiscuously—many husbands or many wives being degeneracy.

It would have interested me to find out if the wives regarded their lord and master as the great creation he evidently thought himself—if they were deceived with him. Perpetual prompting wears away a wife. And, of course, it is never the man himself a woman falls in love with, but that which she believes him to be. It's a great mercy for the average man that all women are such highly imaginative beings.

I noticed what a diversity of ears all the men had, and how careful they were to cover them with their papaks instead of pressing them outwards, as so many of our busbied soldiers do.

Cecily always says that, just as Frank Richardson is a crank on whiskers, so am I on ears. There's such a lot of character in ears, and the varieties to be seen in Daghestan would have charmed the mind of a Lombroso. As a rule ears run in families, and

the conformation varies but little, but in this small settlement every sort and kind of ear was to be studied, the pointed, the erect, the flat, the flap, the stuck-out, the pretty, the neat, the heavy-lobed, the thick-rimmed, the thin-rimmed, the intricate, the open, the hirsute, the fiery, the flabby, the gouty—all so expressive and so extraordinarily diverse. I tried to question Ali about them, but to no purpose. Everyone could hear, he said, and that was all that mattered.

If their ears varied, their voices did not. They were loud and self-assertive. The savage shouts because he is always talking over long distances, either across valleys, or rivers, or country. The highly-cultured man speaks so that he can just be heard—there is no need to hit the ear. Perhaps its effect on the voice is the best gift civilization bestows for the tolls levied on us. A beautiful voice is very potent, and has won as many victories as riches or power or the pen. A man may make a speech that will read well in the papers to-morrow, but he may make no effect on his audience without a rich and telling voice.

I wondered how these mountain men talked love to their many wives. Can love be spoken harshly—in raucous tones? I suppose it can. But then, love is a wonderful thing.

When he knew we were out after tûr the Headman said he would save us all further trouble for he had any amount of horns, useless to himself, from which we were welcome to take our pick. He would have us go at once and view the trophies.

Through a low and excessively dark subterranean passage-way, leading from the ground-floor of the Yuzbashi's house, we passed sharply up and out into the light and air, thence to a flight of rough stone steps which led upwards to a cultivated rocky ledge high on the face of a cliff. The earth had all been transported in basketfuls! Throughout Daghestan the natives act exactly as the land had though ground value of Piccadilly, and much prefer these laboriously constructed gardens to the more easily-come-by areas of excellent loam which lie here and there for the hoeing. I thought, maybe, it was a desire to catch every ray of the short-lived sun which popularized these lofty patches, but no,—it was just old-time custom.

In a corner, rotting and dying, was a goodly pile of ibex skulls, evidences of an eaten army. Two or three of the heads were record breakers, as we ascertained by the tape, slain, too, by the primitive muzzle-loaders of the place, quaintly constructed pieces with the shortest of short stocks and longest of long barrels. And we think ourselves so clever with our Mannlichers and our methods!

Our generous friend, willing and anxious to play beneficent provider, could not understand us at all when we refused the pick of the bunch. Perhaps Ali made things a trifle plainer by explaining that all Franks are mad, and this particular lot of Franks madder than most.

Unlike the African natives, who call every bit of old gas piping sight withs set on it "rifle," these big mountain men envied us our weapons not at all.

Far more ordinary things appealed. A sponge floating in a rubber basin, the methylated spirit lamp as it emitted a blue flame, the butterfly net and killing bottle, and a tin of taxidermine excited their utmost admiration and cupidity. And perhaps of all their possessions I most desired their limitless sang-froid, and the free, royal, swinging grace of their gait. It was their finest asset. They walked as though the whole world lay beneath their feet and it was wholly theirs.

Throughout the mountain land the natives took payment in paper money after the coin supply gave out, but not before the filthy notes had been submitted to the close scrutiny of the financiers of the village and pronounced genuine. The dirtier the notes the more negotiable. One recently issued and comparatively cleanly five-rouble bill raised their suspicions to refusal point.

From this land of plenty we perversely trekked away, crossing deep corries filled with snow shoots, hard as iron, sighting many *tûr* on the high cliffs, all in unstalkable situations.

Going round one ugly corner we nearly lost one of our borrowed servants, a gaunt Lesghian, deputed to cook for us. He was trying to persuade a pony to embark on a snow-slope when the little bit of the earth's surface upon which they stood gave way beneath them, and horse and man fell on to the slippery shute, down which they rolled for some feet till a lateral slant of the icy way carried them to a little plateau, blue with gentians, roofing a hideous drop yawning to unknown depths below.

We stood silent, powerless to do anything, rigid with apprehension.

The pony had on the most impetus, which gained momentarily by reason of its weight and hopeless struggles. For a sickening instant the poor creature hung poised on the edge of the abyss and then was gone. As it fell it screamed piteously. I had never heard a horse cry out in deadly fear before, and this once will do me for a lifetime.

The man was much luckier—or was it force of superior mentality? Landing on the tiny plateau our endangered chef seized a jutting pinnacle and clung to it like a barnacle.

A relief expedition was speedily organized, and with a hair rope—a wonderfully strong, light commodity purchased in Tiflis—the man was hauled to safety. He had to be allotted a horse to ride, being too overcome to proceed on foot, but he had no bones broken.

As a rule the dangers of the passes in Daghestan are much exaggerated, but many of the so-called passes—passes not even marked on maps, being just short-cuts and byways of purely local reputation, were never made by Nature to be passed at all.

Sometimes as we followed these rents in the mountains, creeping spider-wise along a little riband-like path where the cliff curved over our heads, and swept on to abysmal depths below, we came to points where it would have been tricky work for a rider to dismount, and to stick to one's steed and pray to the Great Craftsman for a wider road was the only policy. In such places, whenever I saw them

looming, I was no equestrian, and much preferred my own feet.

When we noticed the route narrowing we looked to the packages on the mules and ponies, for unless these were close and compact there was a danger of some chance rocky projection catching the cargo, and in the struggle for freedom the laden animal would lose its balance and fall over the precipice.

It is strange that a mule, a sententious creature in so many ways, shows such poor judgment always in the choice of a path. They are such astute travellers over any sort of country, but in the selecting of it display no discrimination at all.

None of our men did much in the porter line, and grumbled mightily at a load of more than twenty pounds! I wonder what the Chinaman would say to this, with his 120 lbs. burden carried ungrudgingly for hours and hours.

The wind at this altitude was never in the same mood for ten minutes together, but it was glorious tûr country, and we saw any number. Ali, however, would hear of no halting, and goaded us on remorselessly. He had brought us out to shoot his particular corrie, and hunt it we should.

That evening our henchman went out from camp on his own, and bagged an ibex doe with his ancient muzzle-loader. The horns were very cracked and small, and its throat was gashed from ear to ear—fit food for True Believers. The men roasted the creature on sticks, over an infinitesimal wood fire, and ate semi-raw lumps of meat until far into the night. Such luxuries as forks

were unknown. One or two of the men used sharp knives, which fitted into the back of the kinjal sheath, but most tore the meat very tidily with their fingers. The boiled millet seed, pounded, in which they simply revelled, they rolled into balls to be swallowed whole, and the water used for cooking they drank as a sort of soup.

Hitherto, we had regarded Ali's muzzle-loader as a beautiful relic merely. After the tûr slaughter he offered to lend the weapon to us. He loaded up, and after fixing a sort of rest to the stock, said the performance could begin. Cecily had been aiming for some seconds at a big rock, and was waiting and waiting, but nothing happened. The powder fizzed in the pan, and—that was all. Striding up to his treasure Ali administered a sound slap on its barrel, just as though he had a naughty child to deal with, and on the instant the refractory implement belched forth in a little gulping puff of expostulation.

“ You've not hit the rock ! ” said Ali sternly. “ My rifle always hits the rock.”

To our astonishment, and I'm sure to our servant's, although he dissembled very well, the blessed thing let fly again ! Cecily said she didn't pretend to understand machine guns, and preferred something that went off and was done with it. “ Now you don't know where you have this rifle of yours, Ali.”

“ These mad Franks ! ” his angry eyes exclaimed. Had she not seen his beloved weapon always across his back ?

Only a suicidal tûr, surely, would wait for Ali Ghirik.

At last we reached the Mecca of the jaunt, not one corrie, but many. We pitched camp, and made it as comfortable as could be, and sent back the pack animals to some good grazing ground five or six miles away. There was no timber within twelve or fourteen.

Our bivouac was most beautifully situated, at so high an altitude that oftentimes we mistook the low-hanging clouds for peaks. The song of the torrent racing through the ravine below deceived us into thinking it the wind rising, until we got used to it and didn't hear it at all. We looked right down into the seething whiteness, where black rocks showed above the rushing waters, like the rounded backs of so many hippopotami. The Siwash Indians in British Columbia always say that where the rocks are black the waters are white, which is true of their rapids, and in Caucasia is illustrated also.

We had not the luxury of camp beds, but our sleeping-bags laid out on tiny round pebbles, strewn very thickly, provided comfortable resting-places. The stones kept out the damp and yielded to the body, and were certainly as soft to lie upon as the average seaside lodging-house bed, for which you have to pay ever so much.

Perhaps the real consciousness of the wilds we had reached only came to us in the dark hours. All was so solemn, so weird, so still. I have never felt a stillness like it. And when, perhaps, the haunting cry of some rare night-bird cut the silence, the indescribable desolation seemed intensified a hundredfold. On every side loomed mighty isolated terraces where even ghosts

dare not walk, but the tûr did. Higher still rose snow-crowned peaks, shrouded in a diaphanous robe which was eternal.

Every little thing had some touch of poesy about it. Only the camp trials preached mundanity.

Our first hunting day of glorious memory yielded wonderful results. Cecily and I tracked a silver-grey bear and got him eventually in a rock pile. We were spying out the land from the crest of a ridge, and our glass showed us several groups of tûr feeding on the opposite slopes. As there was no way of going round, we had perforce to cut straight across the dividing valley, and chose out the least-difficult-looking descent, whose broken lines took more negotiating than we thought. Ali had no alpenstock, and his moccasins, being stuffed with grass under the sole, were so very slippery. His rifle—wonderful weapon!—to the rescue. Detaching it from its slings he dug the muzzle ruthlessly into the stones. I almost felt my aristocratic Mannlicher shiver with horror.

We arranged the stalk very badly, and brought up to windward and far out of range. At the moment we put the mistake down to the capricious Boreas, but after a lapse of days we owned up to each other that it was the miscalculation of two cousins which spoiled the show.

After the first shock of disappointment we took heart and followed the tracks of the flying tûr. Through the telescope we located them once again, settling down to feed perhaps a thousand yards away.

Now, as we schemed to get well above them, a piece

of cotton-grass thrown to the winds counselled us. At the half of the climb a covey of snow-partridge frustrated the plan, and their shrillings carried the alarm afar. Sentinels for the tûr these birds.

In a trice the hill-side was clear of game !

It was on this morning that we saw a griffon vulture kill a full-sized tûr without any more ado than we should make at exterminating a fly. The bird swooped suddenly from a great height, striking just as a gannet strikes, and lighted upon the shoulder of its unthinking prey. In the struggle and swirl of wings I could not see the ravening vulture tearing the eyes from its victim, but as Cecily, who had the glass, reported the progress of the unequal battle, I could feel the cruel thing in the air. We were far, far out of range, and the tragedy went on. At first the bird pinned the ibex to the ground, but presently the poor beast freed itself, and staggered on a few paces, pursued by the flapping Nemesis, who ruthlessly drove the stricken animal over the edge of a little cliff down which he fell heavily. For an unhurt ibex such a toss would be as nothing, for this maimed one it was the end. Instantly the vulture was on his prey again, ripping, despoiling, killing.

The death roll of the tûr must be a high one. The Cinereous vulture and his cousin the Griffon, the Lammergeyer, the hawk tribe, and the eagle-owls—all to be fed. The grey bear, too, has to take in enough fuel to warm his blood over the winter. He preys upon the very old and the very young ibex, although the mountain men have it that Bruin kills his beasts by rolling stones upon them from a great height ! Ground

game I know the bear seeks diligently—and finds it, too.

A miniature glacier descended to the valley level, an iridescent narrow way, the veriest baby of glaciers, gleaming with prismatic colours in the sunlight. For a few yards down its length the edges dripped water, and towards its centre also the snowy stream was softened by the action of accumulated moisture beneath.

As we interestedly examined the quaint shapes and pinnacles, caves and fairy palaces, lit by a hundred pharos-fires, we realized that something familiar stared up at us from the icy surface, unforgettable imprints, like, yet unlike, those of a man. The sloppy mould still held the contour, and the spoor was unmistakable. A bear—and a good one, too. Right over the glacier the footsteps went unhaltingly, evenly, in a single trail, heels to us, toes to the great beyond.

Quickly we got out the tape, and the impress of the hind feet—all we could reach—came out at eleven inches.

We lost all interest in the further pursuit of humdrum tûr. A grey bear allured us. We knew that the tracks were those of the rare silver-grey, for he alone frequents the snow-line, and whether his coat were bad or good he must have a head, and that we envied him.

Besides, this grey Bruin of the Caucasus is an animal worth the bagging. He is a fighter. I love a fight and a good fighter, perhaps because I'm not an Achilles and have so many vulnerable spots. Give me the

enemy who finds them out and lunges for them, leaving me to defend myself as best I can.

I would have every woman a Beatrice—Oh, what a big-game hunter was lost in Beatrice! I don't mean Dante's. She may have been insipid. I'm sure she smelt of bread, of butter.

Ali stood there with the wind blowing through his ragged tscherkesska, looking ever so picturesque, and besought us, *us*, not to cross the treacherous glacier, for all the world as though we had never met a glacier before. The biggest one in all the Caucasus is an atom to the miles and miles of massed ice in the Alaskan ranges.

If I persisted in going over, said Ali, warningly—clearly he thought me the most absurd of the two— instant submersion would be my fate, as it would be Cecily's to stand like Ariadne a-weeping on the shore. It was so nice and flattering of him to choose our company rather than our room that it crushed down our feelings of rising superiority, and we feigned complete ignorance of all to do with glaciers and their ways.

Very often when a woman is most ignorant with a man she is at her cleverest. But I expect you know that without my telling you?

Unsophisticated Ali took the trip in hand and piloted us and taught us and directed us, and was so happy and important and masculinely knowledgeable that our uninformed state presently developed into hopeless depths of illiteracy, which gave him a second chance to teach us all the things we ought to know.

And even a savage grows mild when he is instructing a woman in things she ought to know and doesn't.

After the spoor left the glacier tracking became most difficult, for the nature of the ground gave no hint of the passing of a large beast. It was stony, with dry tufted mosses struggling for life, very different from a sand waste where the imprints stand out, or from damp oozy soil in which embedded tracks tell their history, their age, and all about themselves. It's hard to make deductions from a heap of stones.

We each took a prescribed radius of the mountain-side for thorough investigation—neck-aching work. I made nothing of my bit of country. All I found was a "niffy" portion of a long-dead tûr. The eagles had been at him, and now the sexton-beetles were conscientiously playing undertaker.

As all hope of running our quarry to earth died hard, Ali whistled softly. He had crossed another snow-patch in his wanderings, and joy! on its surface the looked-for imprints appeared again—very many tracks—showing that this was the main route traversed daily. Carefully we sorted out the footsteps which we took to be the most recent, and followed whither they led. Abruptly they lost themselves again on a wide plateau, where small stones lay scattered thickly at the mouth of a cave-like aperture, arching over our heads. The entrance to a massive grey pile, like the ruins of some vast cathedral.

Going warily now, we passed beneath the sombre portals into the midst of a piece of wild masonry

awesome in its grandeur. Nature had outdone the art of any architect.

The place was roughly cruciform, and piled blocks of dark stone formed aisles and porches. Storm-beaten columnar rocks gloomed through the shadows. Gothic arches spanned the intersections of the accurately-placed transepts, and between the overhanging gables the wind sobbed a turbulent *De Profundis*.

How I should have loved to see the silver glory of a harvest moon strike through the roofless choir and light the way across the mysterious sanctuary! No Tintern, or Furness, or Fountains Abbey could compare with this careless monument, for the work was Nature's own, and therefore flawless.

I wondered if any other human beings had ever found the stately wilderness or were we its first explorers. It was completely *terra incognita* to our servant.

Ali Ghirik intimated his intention of turning back ere we met the High Priest of the strange cathedral. All along the way he had been inviting the Prophet to guide his steps, and now the eerie glamour was too much for him, he lost faith in his Allah, and would guide himself.

"Go by all means, Ali, if you are afraid," said Cecily scornfully. Voice intonations, however, mean nothing to the uneducated.

It was almost too late! From a little eminence, perhaps three feet higher than the stones on which we stood, a stretched neck peered down at us, grotesque in the shadows, a gargoye to add the finishing touch.

“ Into the light ! ” I whispered. “ We’re done if he catches us here.”

Nimbly we skipped into the broad, open nave, where the sunlight flooded down in slanting shafts.

The High Priest followed us. We heard the soft scraping of his claws, and the deep intake of his breath. That alone would have betrayed his kind. All the wild bears I’ve met breathe so, inflating the lungs with noticeable effort, whilst the deflation is more or less noiseless. No other creature either has so deliberate a walk—so peculiarly regular. Every now and then the periodic snuffle of inquiry reached us. There was no doubt as to the nature of the animal.

Standing together in the brilliant light we must have been the cynosure of Bruin’s eyes ; but we were not embarrassed, for there was a good clear space about us. Ali had disappeared. Whither he went or how we could not guess, neither did we care. The sense of being stalked was on us, a grand primeval “ defend yourself ” sort of feeling, which makes wits sharp and instincts keen.

In hurried whispers we decided to take no undue chances. We knew so little about the grey bears ; few people do, save the natives, and their yarns are hardly reassuring. Neither of us had ever been so “ boxed in ” on any previous shoot. Dangers seem halved in the open desert. In a cave of the winds like this in which it was difficult to hear, and impossible to see into corners, the game was too much to the enemy. Chances should be even or slightly against one, not very much so.

In the lurking shadows two little glow-worm lights turned slowly to and fro, to and fro. The High Priest was watching us. It was an eerie sensation, and my spine just pricked with a sensation as of pins and needles as I stood ready for anything and expecting Heaven knows what. We wanted to hold our ground as long as possible, because the men of Daghestan say that these grey bears always charge on sight, and we were anxious to settle the question to our satisfaction. There are, as a matter of fact, very few bears of any species who take the thing so seriously.

All he did for a few seconds was to watch and watch ; and then, as though the sight of us offended him, he growled deeply, not the usual ' Wouf ! ' which often indicates that the bear himself is badly startled, but a fierce prolonged grumbly snarl, and all down the dim aisles the creepy eldritch sound passed fitfully.

The air seemed tense with untoward chances. I felt sure he was coming. Something, a sixth sense, perhaps, warned me to get ready. I dropped on one knee, raised the foresight, and at that instant a bulky shadow outlined itself against the deeper shadows beyond. I pulled off hurriedly, and the indistinct mass fell forward, catching the light as he came. Biting savagely at the wound in his chest he beat the ground in furious impotence, and then, rallying, with a speed I should never have thought possible for so cumbrous a beast, he shot at us, ears back, snout upraised, hind-quarters low, with all the strength and force and striking power of him thrown into the fore-arms. In a few more strides he would have been on us, but—poor

thing!—he reckoned without our modern rifles. He faced no Daghestani muzzle-loader.

Cecily dropped the gallant creature with a well-placed bullet in the chest, which, raking through, despatched him at once. He stopped all movement almost with a click, like a clockwork toy, falling just fifty yards from us. We paced the distance almost at once.

We pulled the hunched mass straight and admired him as he lay extended, noting the difference from other ursine acquaintances, which were very marked as regards his kinsmen of Alaska, to whom indeed this grey long-snouted beast seemed scarce allied.

Why, I wonder, is his snout so inordinately long? He does but little root-grubbing. Nature is never purposeless, and there must be a reason. For the time of year the coat was in fair condition, and I can imagine it in winter as of a beautiful silvery grey. Now it was merely dirty brown-grey, and all the hairs tipped with darker brown as though singed. His thick neck—what little neck a bear possesses is never very swan-like—was ringed with a band of whitish fur, very much shorter than the rest of the pelage.

The prize was an old male, with great hollows beneath his eyes, and worn teeth and claws. I saw he was ever a fighter, his skin was so deeply scored, and his still face bore the ridged seams and scars of many a battle, one cicatrice being of very recent date.

The skinning and beheading was before us, a big proposition, as we had nothing but the most inadequate knives, Ali having gone off with the real skinning tools.

The sudden withdrawal of the sun warned us of the flight of time. Amateurs at the job could not hope to disrobe so large an animal under two or three hours. Miles from camp, with the possibility that our henchman had abandoned us altogether, practically at sea as to our locality, darkness had some terrors for us. I suggested making a sort of funeral pyre to keep off predatory creatures, and then we could return to the dismemberment in the morning. For an hour we worked at carrying stones to lay upon our victim, until at last the grey bulk was encased in a Crusader's tomb, over which the wind chanted a requiem and the shadows drew about.

And thus we left him, poor High Priest, dead in his sanctuary.

Groping our way out through the blackness, striking matches at intervals, we held hands that we might not lose each other. I cannot count the times we tumbled down, or the awful cracks our rifles received. We were some time before we struck the aisle of our entry, but at last we could see in the distance the mountain slopes, the ridges line on line, and the evening sky, luminous and glowing, framed by the cavern's mouth. The scene struck us both as one of unusual beauty, if indeed two people who have just had the amazing luck to shoot a specimen of the rare silver-grey bear of the Caucasus can be judges of anything but their own happiness.

Just outside sat Ali Ghirik, dejected and abashed. He began at once to explain his absence. He was not well, the damp of the place did not suit him. His

aged limbs were chilled, and bears he never liked ; he had never bargained for hunting bears. The Prophet knew that he had never engaged to shoot bears with us. We couldn't help laughing. It was true enough.

Ali had never posed as a shikári, the unwonted sport was thrust upon him. *Pour moi*, I should not care to face any of the bear tribe, either, with nothing but an old matchlock which went off only when it chose. As we laughed, the trouble went from the old man's eyes, and he took a deep draught of the sour milk which hung at his waist in a leaky "bottle," sighed a sigh of complete contentment, and remarked that Allah was great.

CHAPTER X

MORE TÛR HUNTING

Here stand we both, and aim we at the best.

3 Henry VI.

I'll do what I can to get you a pair of horns.

Merry Wives of Windsor.

MEANWHILE Kenneth had bagged a trio of the much-vaunted tûr of the district, and their heads surpassed even Ali's sanguine expectations. The least magnificent beast was apportioned to the men, for we were quite out of the way of the staple food of the country—mutton.

Catering disguised as a game of chance becomes really interesting as it loses its deadly sameness. Some days our larder overflowed, others there were when fresh food was *non est*, and we had to rely on our stock of tinned meats and the men on millet.

As we sat by the small fire trying to forget the cutting wind in fighting the day's battles o'er again, a little ragged hillman, small and nimble as a Goorkha, suddenly appeared in our midst—a surprising apparition. He was quite unlike any of the tribes we had already met, and spoke a patois which baffled our linguist.

How he came to us, so far away from human habitations, was an unsolvable puzzle. He waved

explanatory hands skywards, but we could see no trace of an aeroplane.

Ali said that our new acquaintance was a Tatar crossed so many times that he might almost be anything. He settled down as though he intended remaining, fitting himself into the scheme of things just as though his services had been requisitioned, and playing valet quite intelligently. In the early morning he hauled water from the river for our baths, and even tried to heat some over the tiny fire. It was not his fault that the pan supply was so limited, and that the results of his labour had the greasy appearance of a mutton stew.

Our men took the greatest interest in our washing arrangements at all times. That it was connected with some religious observance they did not doubt, seeing that they themselves only utilized water when prayer-saying. Unfortunately they were not sufficiently energetic with it really to combine their cleanliness with godliness. Indeed, they always returned from a devotional bout rather dirtier than when they went, for the water running in rills divided up their faces into lines which gave them the appearance of tattooed Maoris.

Kenneth welcomed the stranger within our gates as an anthropological study, and at once began to consider his subject anatomically. So far as I remember the result panned out something like this :

Genus, homo.

Ears, bat-like.

Upper lip, prehensile.

Feet, immense.



BEAR SKIN DRYING

Head, undulating.

Age, —.

Nationality, undiscoverable.

Very enlightening and helpful, isn't it?

By the time we had finished breakfast Ali had almost come to blows with the new-comer, and the two of them dominated the camp by their plainly expressed opinions of each other. Matters were difficult to arrange as none of us could speak the stranger's tongue, but by the end of the morning the Goorkha-like creature resolved himself. We took him with us to the cathedral on the mountain, and the exhuming of the bear, coupled with the dread solemnity of the spot, acted on his nerves to such an extent that he simply vanished into space. All the way through the aisles, darker than ever, as the sun was hidden in storm clouds, his eyes had grown rounder and rounder in a great wonder. At intervals he paused to kneel upon a small prayer-mat he carried strung across his back, and in a low distressed voice pray aloud to Allah.

As soon as we missed him we called and called, and searched diligently for fear he was lost in the vast catacombs. But he had gone as he came, mysteriously, unexplainably, just as the natives of Africa who drop into camp from nowhere as suddenly disappear into it again.

When we made camp, with the bearskin and dangling bits of Bruin on Ali's poor old back, we found no fires to welcome us, no simmering ibex stew, nothing but the chill embers of a fire that was. The wood supply was exhausted—nobody had noticed how low the stock

had fallen. Only very tiny scrub bushes grew around us, useless to keep a business-like fire alight for long. We detailed Ali and another to go foraging as soon as morning did appear, and I saw them, through the flap of my tent, start off in the grey dawn, astride two mules, who moved through the mists like phantoms.

Cecily and I got away before there was any chance of having one of the men drafted on to us by Kenneth, who perfectly revelled in arranging everybody into ill-assorted lots.

Our way lay over short grass, slippery as could be, and up the spurs of the towering guardian of our camp. He broke the north winds for us and held back the rain clouds.

As the sun got up the mist came with him, great banks of it, with clear short intervals as the breeze drove the vapour upwards. There was nothing to do but sit down and pray for a dispersal, and "in the chronicle of wasted time" these hours of total eclipse stand foremost. Each cloud-wreath sweeping back carried another on its filmy skirts.

A real break at last! We swept the slopes for signs of game, and with the glass located two moving dots in the depths below. Ibex, skipping and frolicking, carrying grand heads, too. From ledge to ledge the agile creatures jumped, from pinnacle to pinnacle. First, one took a gigantic upward leap and the other followed, then higher sprang the boldest, but a courageous imitator was on his heels. They kept these gymnastics up until we hoped they would eventually join us on the heights and save us an infinitude of

trouble. If ibex only would be so obliging! "Much virtue in If."

They ceased their mountaineering, and let us in for a longish stalk, which finally brought us within about 170 yards of the creatures, but even at that near thing they looked absurdly small, so steep was the side of the kloof whereon they fed, so high and directly above them were we.

I lay down on the edge of a jutting spur and took careful aim at the tûr whose head looked the weightiest. Bang! A clean miss. I had gone far too high, as often happens in downhill shots. A little more foresight—and a trifle more insight!—and the beast had been mine.

I didn't really think of foresight or insight at the moment, for at such awful times one takes things in the absolute concrete and there's no desire to theorize. Theories are for the unemployed.

The other tûr, whose life had not been attempted, took a forceful header, which carried him down the precipitous place like a bounding ball. He reached the valley level in a flash, and took the torrent in his stride as though its foaming waters were a mere thread. Into the grey of the opposite boulders he passed and was lost to sight.

The headlong rush of ibex reminds me of the flight of birds. The same lightness and abandon is in their impetuous action, the same marvellous equipoise, the same ease and rapidity of movement. I never saw that gloriously free downward sweep without being brought to think of eagles soaring above the snow peaks.

Instead of trying to escape downwards my quarry fled upwards, and—the Fates against him—a sheer wall which even his genius could not tackle brought him up. He stood for the fraction of a second with feet close together, head up, sniffing about him in bewilderment, and a beam of fitful sunlight struck the massive patriarchal horns. I broke the seventh commandment into little pieces.

I had no time to fire. Even as I got the sights on him he skipped away, and put several more feet betwixt us. I hate unsporting long shots, which more often than not condemn a beast to an end unthinkable. In open country hazardous shots are occasionally permissible, for you can ride your quarry down, but in a land of precipices, “fool-shots,” as the Americans call these off-chances, are indefensible.

Virtue had its reward. Suddenly, for no good reason that I could see, the ibex lessened the distance which separated us and stood calmly fore-on, meditating, as though nothing untoward had occurred to disturb his peace. It was an awkward sideways shot, and Cecily’s eyebrows went up disapprovingly as I essayed it. But—

“We must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.”

A quick rush down hill followed on the crack of the rifle. What a moment was mine! I made sure I had missed again, or at most merely grazed the tûr. When suddenly—he collapsed and fell. On and on he rolled, head over heels, and nothing checked his passage until the torrent claimed him.

It took us a long time to reach the water-logged prize, but when we did we saw that his watery grave was shallow and hardly covered him. The beautiful horns rose above the surface, like gnarled arms. That they remained intact after such a battering was a sporting miracle.

Only we could not retrieve him! Try as we would, the creature was immovable and firmly embedded between two rocks; so, after an average wetting apiece, we decided on returning to camp and sending out the men to conduct salvage operations.

Kenneth was among his entomological boxes again. He hadn't shot anything all day, but had netted a sort of long-drawn-out "Daddy-Long-Legs," with a tiny red face and swollen body, which he said was a great find.

The wood-foraging party had not returned. We were just beginning to cast predatory eyes on the camp furniture borrowed from the shooting-box when one of the men appeared on the bare slope below, driving before him the two mules piled high with faggots. He did not seek to unload the beasts, but made a bee-line for Kenneth, when a mysterious confab ensued, made up of arm-wavings, a sort of dumb-crambo entertainment, for Kenneth's linguistic powers stopped off at Lesghian.

Cecily and I, all inquisitive, joined the group, and sat in judgment on a play on words, words which thoroughly mystified and befogged us all.

As the man stood waiting expectantly for his reply, we three compared notes as to what on earth the thing was about. Kenneth's idea of it was that the man wished

to convey the news that Ali Ghirik had fallen over a precipice, and a wolf waiting at the bottom had eaten him up, clothes and all. I guessed that our servant had tried bathing in an ice-stream, after carefully placing his clothes in a heap on the bank, and the shock of the immersion had killed him straight off. Cecily said she thought Ali had met a tribesman actuated by a blood-feud, who despatched our poor henchman with the celebrated muzzle-loader, after which the murderer annexed the clothes of his victim. We were all at one on the clothes question. Clearly clothes formed the bed-rock of the whole affair.

The wild actor began again. He tore his tscherkesska off as though it were a shirt of Nessus, and threw it far away; then he ripped at his next garment, and Heaven knows how far he would have descended had not Kenneth by strenuous force forbade the shedding of anything else. Excitedly the man pulled out his kinjal from its sheath and flung that away also. Then he gave a piercing yell which brought the rest of the servants about us pell-mell.

“ Poor beggar’s falling over the precipice now ! Can’t you understand it ? ”

“ That means he is just beginning to drown ! What else could he be doing ? ”

“ His relative is commencing to kill him ! Isn’t it too dreadful ? ”

Finally the energetic illustrator tried to immure himself in a little dug-out hole which we used as a larder, from whence he peered up at us, like an injured spaniel, with a world of meaning in his plaintive eyes.

We could make simply nothing of it, and, bereft of Ali, all means of communicating with the rest of the men, who were all Lesghians, was cut off.

Tea seemed the thing of most moment, and we joyfully set to work on a fire. Going into Kenneth's tent for some matches I found our friend of the dumb-crambo entertainment rummaging in my cousin's things, tossing them hither and thither in deep-set purpose. He extracted a spare tscherkesska and other oddments whilst I watched him, and these things he signified his intention of bestowing on something which lived apparently rabbit-fashion, in a burrow.

It was useless trying to unravel the mystery, so I didn't try, but left him.

After tea we sat, pleasantly tired, on hard camp chairs studying Omar and wondering what he—or rather FitzGerald—means sometimes. Our library, of course, was very limited, but it had been selected with care. It isn't every book which bears minute dissection. We had pocket editions of Shakespeare, Omar, and Darwin, in any one of which one may become engrossed.

Everything Darwin touches is made so beautiful by the magic of his mind. I should like to know his description of birds in *The Descent of Man* off by heart, and I could read his theory of the ball-and-socket ocells on the plumage of the Argus pheasant a hundred times.

There was as much Kingsley as restriction of kit permitted, for of all writers Kingsley most belongs to the mountain-tops, the free air, and the grand sweet song of life.

Kenneth's choice was "the author with the largest public." According to my cramped and cabin'd ideas what a falling off was there! He read *The Lady Trainer* backwards and forwards, began to translate *The Selling Plater* into Russian, and tried to make us listen to *The Roarer*, o' nights, but that we resolutely vetoed by slipping off to bed.

After all, in the wilderness, "exempt from public haunts," the written words of even immortals take a minor place. The greatest book ever penned is lying open, the book of Nature, and you may read it where-soever you will.

The greatest character in the greatest book is not so interesting as the simplest of the wild people. Every hour, too, you make a new and more-fascinating-than-the-last acquaintance. Or you reach the Red Letter Day when for the first time in all your life you make friends with yourself. There's nothing like the back of beyond for teaching you your limitations, your strength, your weakness, your capacity.

But where was I? I remember. In the gap 'twixt tea and dinner. You must bear with me, you know, for I hate points of any kind. Anyone who wants a coherent, compact, condensed book on Caucasian sport must not tackle this riot of random jottings.

Then—dinner. Shisliks of ibex, with jam and biscuits as a sweet. Not a slow dinner, but full of banter and chaff and leg-pulling—it helps digestion. Then—music. The murder of Samson by Delilah, in more senses than one. It would have made poor Saint-Säens weep to hear us. Then—bed. To be



ALI GHIRIK

wakened in the wee sma' hours by the return of the prodigal, Ali Ghirik, uneaten by a wolf, not drowned, not murdered by a tribesman, clothed, too, in Kenneth's spare Sunday-go-to-meeting tscherkesska.

He talked in three languages at once, and it was all very disjointed and very funny. The sum-total of his story was that he had been, as Walt Whitman would euphemistically put it, "to the bank of the wood, and become all disguised and naked."

A roving band of mountain robbers had forcibly taken his clothes, his kinjal, and the wonderful weapon he called "rifle," after which they thrust the forlorn one into a cave to live or die as he best chose.

It took our servant the best part of the morning to bring his bedraggled appearance up to what he considered proof, and it was not until he had stewed—and in the ubiquitous stock-pot!—some remnants of beard-moss gathered in the forest and laid by for emergencies, with which decoction he dyed his hands, his beard, and his atom of hair, that he was at ease again. All the other men came to dip their solitary love-locks into the mixture, on the principle, I suppose, of "waste not, want not." They nearly all had shaven heads, with the one spared tuft hanging over the forehead. Here and there we met a Lesghian with a fine lot of hair, and such a man, with his aquiline nose, high forehead, and black eyes, looked an Adonis beside his brethren.

We moved camp back to the timber line, some miles, so that Kenneth, in whom the entomological ardour burns like a raging fire, could do some execution

with his killing bottle. He caught every common insect he saw, in terror lest he let some rarity escape. Yellow, green, white, brown, tiny ones, big ones, swift fliers, slow fliers, all were moths who fell into his net. I don't know anything about insect-hunting myself, except the A B C of the science forced upon all travellers, but it must be powerfully attractive. It is an absolute fact that in the midst of an exciting chase after a tûr hit only in the near fore-leg, Kenneth left me to pursue the wounded animal the while he tried to add a coveted moth to his collection. He bagged the wretched thing, and I got my tûr. Imagine setting moth-hunting against that of ibex, and the former coming in first at the winning-post !

To make it all sound very important, my cousin always called his moths by their scientific names. The particular beastie was called " *Geometra papilionaria*," but I don't think the poor thing knew it, for the little face looked singularly peaceful as the insect sat pinioned in a collecting-box.

The very quaintest of spiders with the very longest of fore-legs had homes in the fir trees in the valley bottoms. They disported themselves on slack wires running from one branch to another, and if you frightened one it pretended to be dead by suddenly dropping to the ground on a long thread, where it lay apparently lifeless, with outstretched arms and flabby body. Even if you turned him over, the quaint insect kept up the pretence. Ceecily told Ali that these were certainly the largest spiders we had seen in the country, and he said they were likely to be, when you took into consideration the

endless quantities of web necessary for such prodigious spans. He evidently imagined that the spider silk was coiled up in the creature, like the Atlantic Cable on the *Great Eastern*.

Very few small birds lived in the valleys at this altitude. Here and there in a dried watercourse the shrike preyed on lizards. His larder was always full, and the carcasses of toads, beetles, crickets, and large flies were impaled on the brambles around.

Everywhere a low plant grew in rocky interstices, and from its root the Lesghians decoct a sort of bitter tea. Cecily decided that she would introduce the small plant into her far-distant garden, and burdened her lily-white steed with a basketful of specimens, which died the death daily until all had disappeared.

One day as we looked over a bold scarped precipice we noticed the roosting place of a colony of Cinereous vultures. We counted four old birds and four young ones. They were five hundred feet or so below us, but, by firing into the air, we startled them into flight. The whole eight swept away in great curves, wheeling, circling, ascending, descending, in effortless grace with scarcely a pinion beat. I count it as one of the majestic wonders of the world to see the Vulturidæ a-wing. I could watch them for hours.

Later in the week Cecily bagged a specimen, with the intention of curing it. We were out after partridge for the pot when suddenly a vulture, hanging low over some carrion rotting in a ravine, presented more than a sporting chance.

Our fallen trophy was only reached after the steepest

of climbs down rocks as big as bathing-vans, and when we got to him he smelt so intolerably, and his outside feathers sheltered such armies of lice, that we left him to make a meal for his rapacious cannibal friends. We measured his wings, and the span of them came out at six and a half feet. He was a dirty ash-grey in colour, with a bald and knowing head, yellow beak, and very scaly feet. An unattractive personality—very.

Now we began to talk of departure, for yet many creatures remained to be hunted in other parts, and there was so little time to hunt them in, as none of us yearned to face the rigours of a Caucasian winter.

Ali was all for remaining where we were. He drew his two roubles a day complacently, and presently would be rich enough, he said, to essay matrimony! Well, it must take some contriving in a country where it is conducted on so generous a scale. But really our servant had left things very late. With us at home if a man waits until he has sufficient money on which to negotiate matrimony comfortably, he usually gains enough sense not to.

The little shooting-box was shut up for the winter as we passed it. Everything looked very forlorn and lonely. Broken horns of *tûr* lay about the plateau whereon we had picnicked so short a time ago; a loose wooden slate rattled desolately. There was nothing for it but to take the borrowed "extras" to Lagodekki, not much out of our way, and restore them to the owners.

Over the bleak Vanlishet Pass—like the Bad Lands of Dakota, covered with rocks shaped like prehistoric

creatures—we trekked out of grim Daghestan and so to the big military cantonment of Lagodekki, a place of barracks and rampant militarism. Here we lunched in the quaintest half-under-the-street caravanserai of Ali's choosing, on pilav, rice with raisins and other fruits, sugared cucumbers, and caviare, which had seen much better days.

The great fishing centre for the ubiquitous caviare is Boji Pramysl, on the Caspian at the mouth of the Kura, and all along the coast to the Russian fishing station near Ghazian.

Lagodekki is amazingly civilized. That is why we resisted the hospitable blandishments of our Russian friends. Our clothes spoke of savagery.

At night we outspanned in a little place fringing the steppe country, a well-tilled village inhabited by numerous Molokani, or Milk people, so called because they drink milk on fast days. This sect is yet another variety of Russian dissenters, or, as the Muscovite always terms them, heretics.

If you are lucky enough to be born into a dissenting Russian family, you are, subject to the most outrageous restrictions, permitted to dissent in peace for the rest of your life, but if you secede from the Orthodox Church once you have been in the grip of its monopolistic arms, woe betide you! To dissent from anything means that a man is beginning to think for himself, and the Russian Church, with its intolerant, warping influences, does not encourage thinkers of any kind.

The difference between all the dissenters, freed men,

and their Orthodox bondmen brethren is everywhere most noticeable, and the transformation effected by emancipation from the galling yoke of the tentacled Church of the Holy Russian Empire is incalculable. It means, in a word, freedom. And that is the greatest possession in all the world.

“Look here, upon this picture and on this.”

Contrast the Orthodox moujik village, with its filth-laden street of broken-windowed dwellings, where the grain, if there is any, is threshed by Stone Age methods and winnowed by the wind, with the prosperous sectarian colony, tree-embowered, where every homestead is equipped with necessaries, well kept and burnished.

“She is good, like a Molokani wife,” is an expression often heard in the Caucasus, and after a sojourn in a Molokani household we understood its meaning.

But they doubted us—the good people, in spite of their hospitality and generous ways. They couldn’t help doubting us. How came it that we spoke Russian so well? Might we not be secret agents of a Government bent on extracting one more tribute of Cæsar’s many? Or, perchance, political propagandists, or even some new type of missionary?

After a supper, served in a spotless room, like an inn in Holland, of eggs scrambled, Molokani-fashion, with milk, and well-baked white bread, our hostess diffidently introduced the Starshina, or headman of the settlement, who wore a tin disc on his chest which betokened his authority.

This worthy was a grey-muzzled curmudgeon, far

gone in misogyny, misanthropy, and unhappy things of the kind, who at once set to work on the quaintest catechetical examination of Kenneth, which Cecily translated for me as they went along.

“ What are these papers ? ”

“ Passports,” said my cousin laconically.

“ And these people ? ” indicating Cecily and me.

“ English, like myself.”

“ How am I to know that ? You speak Russian. Why should the English wish to ride about the country in this manner ? ”

“ We have been in the mountains—after tûr, you understand ? ”

“ That I do not. Your wives—what have they to do with tûr ? There must be a better reason for your travel ? ”

“ That is our reason, tûr, and to see the Caucasus.”

“ Ha ! You wish to see the Caucasus. For what reason ? You wish to write about it in the papers. You have already written ! ” And before Kenneth could arrest him the old man had nipped a red book out of an open pocket.

“ That is *The Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám, sir, if you must know,” said my cousin, with rising temper.

“ A Persian Khan ! We do not like him. We have nothing to do with Persians here. What else have you ? ”

“ Nothing, I fancy, to interest you, unless you appreciate good rifles and an average camera.”

“ Who gave you permission to carry these things ? ”

Our permits unfolded, the old man lapsed into deep

thought as he carefully spelt out the names—he could read apparently—and fingered the expensive seals.

“ How did you make the money wherewith to undertake this journey ? ” he began again.

“ I didn't. It came to me,” said Kenneth, smiling.

“ Ha ! Someone dropped it and you picked up the roubles. You must see the Governor in the morning. Without doubt you must see the Governor in the morning.” Then, with a sort of second wind he set off afresh, at best pace. “ Why do you want the heads of tûr ? ”

“ To look at, don't you know. Put 'em up on the wall. Hang it ! ” in English, “ what's the old blighter going to ask next ! ”

“ Are you celebrated people ? ”

“ Oh, very. Especially these ladies. They are the Two Dianas from Somaliland.”

Slowly the inquisitor turned his eyes on us and looked us up and down.

“ I do not know them,” he said. “ Are they related to your Prince Gladstone ? Of him I have heard. But they cannot want tûr. There is something very strange that they should travel so far for tûr. I must find a reason for this journey. You must see the Governor in the morning.”

In England we expect everything to come to him who waits, even if the thing waited for spoils in the transit or arrives in a very dashed condition, but in Russia “ the morning ” never comes. So we never met that Provincial Governor because it took so long for “ Zaftra ! ” (to-morrow) and “ Sichas ” (directly) to materialize.

CHAPTER XI

A TRIP TO VLADIKAVKAZ AND KARBARDA

But this exceeding posting day and night
Must wear your spirits low.

All's Well that Ends Well.

Gratitude

From flinty Tartar's bosom would peep forth.

All's Well that Ends Well.

TIFLIS, on our return to it from the cool heights of Daghestan, was like a little Inferno. The white houses and red and green roofs of the city reflected the sun's rays in lances of fiery heat—there was no shade or air, and nothing to do but drowse. No rain had fallen since our departure, and nobody seemed to expect any. At night the sky over the engirdling brown hills was alight with vivid flashes of lightning, and the low rumble of the distant thunder encouraged the hopes of a shower which never came.

We made hurried haste to leave the enervating oven. Kenneth departed for the health resort of Borjom, about eighty miles away—the lady of the *boca provocativa* mouth had flown thither. Cecily and I, *chez* our retainer Ali Ghirik, whom we continued to retain because he resolutely refused to be cast off, gathered our kit together for a trip, via the Georgian Road, to Vladikavkaz, thence to the wilds of

Karbarda, to stay with the Prince. *The* Prince, when there are at least two thousand in the Caucasus !

If you like I can manufacture a name for His Highness, since it is not fair to record his real one. But "the Prince" should suffice, for we met no other on really intimate terms, unless I except an amiable Ossete who waited upon us at meals in the Tiflis *auberge*. He was a tributary princelet, he confided, with nobody left to pay him tribute. According to Ali Ghirik all the royalties from the wilds who go out of the prince business pass into that of "buttlng" in post-houses and hotels. A very good idea, I thought, and an excellent school in the event of a return to prosperity. Of course, a servitor prince has his pathetic side, but, as Byron put it, "He must serve who fain would sway."

The usual method of getting about the trodden ways of the Caucasus is by posting, a system of locomotion godfathered by the Government. The very necessary "Open Sesame" for the obtaining of post-horses is called a *podorojnaya*, without which indispensable, to be presented to every master of an official post-station when a change of steeds is required, a traveller might as well set out to do the journey on foot.

There are *podorojneeya* and *podorojneeya*: the common variety under whose bar sinister you wait and wait for your fresh horses, dependent on the meaningless promise of the catchword of the country, "Sayetchass! Sayetchass!" Directly! Directly! and the posting order *de luxe*, or Crown *podorojnaya*, the beneficent working of which has to be tried in contradistinction to the other ere its blessings can be fully ap-

preciated. This Crown *podorojnaya* is the prerogative of all engaged on official business, and is also readily and courteously granted to travellers who have had the forethought to provide themselves with commendatory letters of introduction.

There is yet another type of *podorojnaya*, the Courier, a "clear the line" order, bestowed only on Government messengers and very, very important persons.

To be clear of the nuisance of having to apply for a fresh licence to travel each time we took the road, we adroitly manœuvred a comprehensive Crown *podorojnaya* which passed us anywhere, and held good throughout the rest of our stay.

The telega and the tarantass are the vehicles provided on these post-road journeys and there are no springs in either, for these conveyances have to be proof against the roughest roads and the onslaughts of the amateur mender. Besides, the more springs to your carriage the more horses does the postmaster consider you require, although one would imagine that the thing ought to work out contrariwise.

The telega is simply an oblong wooden box, a sort of primitive coracle, set right on to the wheels, of which there are four. The passenger sits on the floor, which is about a foot below the gunwale, on an interlacement of rope called a *pereplot*. The driver has a little board fixed just below the outer edge of the shay, near the tails of the horses, or, as an alternative, bounds about loose on the luggage. How he adheres to the oscillating heap for a moment is a perfect mystery, for he gets the brunt of the jolts as he drives *ventre-à-terre* up hill,

down dale, stopping not for brake, staying not for stone.

The tarantass, christened in smiling sarcasm after the dance, has a trifle more elasticity about it, for several pliant poles run beneath the seat, and this vehicle accommodates four people at a push, if one sits beside the driver. Sometimes it takes a cover to itself, a hood which comes up from behind, supposedly to give shelter from the dust, which it really attracts like the mouthpiece of a vacuum cleaner.

The tarantass is more comfortable than the telega, but Russians make nothing of travelling in either, and a case-hardened veteran frequently goes for sixty hours on end, just lying on a little straw placed in the bottom of the six by four "carriage." Everyone looks upon the two hundred and six versts between Tiflis and Vladikavkaz as a mere London to Brighton coaching trip, although a verst equals three-quarters of an English mile.

The post-carts are supposed to be changed, like the horses, at each fixed stage, a most uncomfortable rule; for some of the bone-shakers are worse than others, or else it is that we prefer to suffer ills we know of than sample others. With great perseverance, and a firm resolve to have "Yes" for an answer, it is usually possible for the well-treated foreigner to obtain the concession of a vested interest in a desirable conveyance and continue in the same throughout the journey. A be-sealed document setting forth this boon should be obtained. Posting-house minions are not the most trusting of mortals.

If you do not require a whole vehicle to yourself, there is a regular service between Tiflis and Vladikavkaz by diligence which carries six persons, not counting driver and conductor. Two first-class individuals contend with the dust which circulates inside the covered omnibus, three second-class ticket-holders have places outside by the driver, and on the principle, I suppose, of the last being first, a "travelling third" is allotted a perch at the back, free of the fog of grit and penetrating sand. If a fourth-class is ever instituted, to what heights of comfort may it not attain!

On discovering that the amount of luggage carried free by diligence is fined down to the near thing of three pounds per passenger, we gave up all idea of utilizing this coach. Our rifles, saddles, provisions, etc., weighed more like three hundred.

Luggage, as we understand the word, is quite impracticable on post-road journeys, and the difficulty of securing boxes to the telega, even to be smashed, takes up endless time. Our kit, though of undoubted utility, was hopelessly untidy, and resembled nothing so much as the outfit of a Manx fisherman off to the herrings. Long sacks, opening lengthwise, and capacious saddle-bags held all our goods and chattels, a plebeian collection enough to take a-visiting. Only one immaculate dressing-case spoke of civilization, and that, whether its gold-topped bottles broke or not, Cecily clung to through thick and thin, because her husband gave it to her. It was a sort of leathery link between them, and a very tying one.

Four horses, worse-for-wear, hardy creatures, har-

nessed abreast, dragged our tarantass through the streets of Tiflis ere Tiflis was yet awake. Behind came Ali Ghirik in a troika, or team of three, with the bulk of our luggage. His three steeds were quite equal to our four, or else his yamschik knew his work better, for we kept close together as we galloped into the plains through the haze of gathering heat which was sweeping down on the city, the hottest in Russian dominions.

Heavily-laden wagons trailed towards us, piled with carpets and mysterious bales of goods. The high-sided carts were most brilliantly painted in reds and greens, the spokes radiated alternate tints, and the wrappings shone multi-coloured. Loads of sun-kissed melons glistened amber and gold. Viewed sideways the line of carts looked like a procession of bright tin toys from Hamley's.

Ruskin told us that wherever men are noble they love colour. "How this grace speaks in its own standing." The caravan was a rainbow broken loose.

In excellent foil were the thick-set, brown-coated Tatars, with their little arsenals hanging about them, and vast papaks of sheep-skin, regular extinguishers, so large and broad as to create quite a little shadow round the wearers. They are not the insufferable head-gear one would imagine, being non-conductors of the sun's rays, but the appearance of the over-weighting *chapeaux* makes one pant sympathetically for the unfortunates beneath.

On the brown grass of the hill-side great white Egyptian vultures moved sluggishly amongst a cart-

load of overturned offal, picking in sated indolence at the fearsome skins and bones with the bored exclusive air of aliens in a land they had come to be a part of. We drove quite close to the impassive birds, whose only means of defence—a very powerful one—is their skunk-like odour. One veteran rose from within a couple of yards of us and sailed away majestically. You would almost take him for a gannet on the wing, save for the black bar across the pinions.

The scenery was not scenery here, just a land burnt up by a brazen sun. The dust enveloped us in clouds, swirling in spiral columns to the tops of the iron telegraph posts, epoch-marking posts. England made them, not Germany.

It requires, they say, a good constitution to travel in Spain. It needs a frame of steel to post in the Caucasus. A very little of it reduces one to a condition of advanced "pins and needles," and one's sight, from dizziness, plays the strongest pranks. Two yamschiks seemed to drive us, two rounded backs curved with the bounds of this astonishing carriage, a troop of galloping steeds slashed the dust in turmoil right and left.

You get a great deal for your money under the regime of Russia sometimes. This indescribable journey cost very little in actual cash. There is an official charge for each verst endured, eight kopecks I think it was, equal to about twopence of our money, and the tarantass or telega is thrown in. The driver expected something like twenty kopecks a stage. The distances between these varied. For instance, Mtsket, our first stop, is about twenty versts out of Tiflis, and

the next post-station came at the end of another fourteen.

If a change of horses could be effected as speedily as the versts are covered posting would rank as one of the quickest methods of systematic locomotion, for the animals gallop when on the straight the whole time. They wear no blinkers, and understand the shouted words of the yamschik in almost human fashion. These rough Jehus have the quaintest way of stopping the rushing steeds, "Purr! Purr! Purr!" rolling the "r's" prettily. A much more taking method than our harsh "Woa! Woa!"

A ruinous little place, Mtsket, the famous one-time capital of Georgia. Here the waters of the Aragva, Strabo's Aragon, join those of the Kura.

Mtsket claims to be as old as any city in the world, and I don't see how the contention can ever be conclusively disproved. When you go grovelling in the vasty recesses of all time, things are apt to get a little beyond even the explanatory powers of the tradition-smashing historian. So Mtsket, with the confidence of invincibility, dates itself back to the day of its chosen founder, Mtsketos, great-great-great-grandson of Noah! In this valley of the Aragva the hero lived, and here, we suppose, he died. No, we did not see his tombstone. That will be "discovered" and all in readiness when we "follow the man from Cook's."

Compared with hoary Mtsket, Tiflis, dating only from A.D. 380, is as an American town, the mushroom of a night.

All along the soft rocky sides of the Kura we noticed

cavernous holes, troglodyte dwellings, terraces of them, crescents of them. One more pretentious than the rest was perhaps the Mtsketos mansion. There was nothing to tell us. We "surmised," as historians say. Mtsketos would have to live somewhere.

Traffic was very brisk on this dustiest of dusty roads. Strings of mules with gaily chiming bells passed us constantly, phaetons, and rattling telegas with passengers of all kinds. Cossacks, in cool-looking white coats and often with steeds to match, created a smoke trail of blinding sand, and now and again, in a column of grit circling feet high, a great britzka of omnibus variety rolled past us conveying some Russian noble to the celebrated springs of Pjatigorsk.

Bowling swiftly round a corner which landlocked our view of the road ahead, Ali Ghirik, who had somehow forged to the front in his troika loaded with our multifarious packages, crashed into a slow-moving fourgon laden high with a medley of silk, carpets, and bright-coloured cushions. The telega, yamschik and our servant were thrown a-heap into a snorting mass of bewildered animals and tumbling bales.

Ali detached himself in remarkably quick time, but, in trying to avoid the frightened plunges of one of our horses, he tripped on the verge of the shallow ravine which the road skirted, and disappeared over the edge.

The *mélange* sorted itself, and after philosophically picking sundry bits of the landscape off his clothes the yamschik helped to disentangle the tangle of our kit. Only one Tatar driver seemed the worse for the *boulc-*

versement, and he looked very shaken indeed as he sat in the midst of the *débris*, holding his arm.

The buffaloes, lethargic as ever, took freedom by the forelock and painstakingly hunted grass spears among the stones; the horses, used to this sort of thing evidently, waited the word to start again. The telega itself, built on the lines of a battering-ram, made simply nothing of the affair.

The poor little injured Tatar drooped like a withering sunflower, of which his black sheepskin hat was the centre and his golden-brown tattered coat the hanging leaves. The Tatars, of course, are all Mahommedans and a good many of them of the fanatical Shiah variety, and this made us hesitate to offer first aid lest we might defile the pitiful object in some way.

However, as he wilted more and more, my cousin and I threw scruples to the winds and split his ragged sleeve to the top. We found a very bad abrasion on the elbow, so we got out our little box of necessaries, and dressed and bandaged the wound quite scientifically. We had a little audience at last, including two Cossacks who were riding by and dismounted to join the interested group.

The ideal Homocea, we knew, was brandy, but the Mahommedan ban on it stood in its reviving way. I suggested to Cecily that the Tatars would not know the meaning of a silver flask, and if we said that it contained a highly efficacious medicine we should carry the thing through, and once the man had swallowed the stimulant nothing very much could happen even if they found the trick out. The invalid was almost

beyond caring what he drank. Cecily spoke to the Cossacks in Russian, and asked them if they knew enough Tatar language to say to the caravan men that we had a remarkable medicine which we wished our patient to take. I ought not to accuse a martial Cossack of winking; such vulgarity is unknown in Russia. This one's eyelid flickered. He gave the matter in hand his best histrionic attention, and a perfect wave of excitement passed through the group as we poured out a strong "dose" into the cup. I did hope nobody was standing to windward of it!

The mixture swallowed, we arranged the sufferer in a comfortable seat on a heap of prayer-mats and left him for a while. The recollection of missing Ali Ghirik returned to us. Down in the stony bed of the ravine where Fate had so rudely cast him our henchman sat, deaf to all humanitarian inquiries. There was nothing to-do but go after him, which we did in a sliding run down the shaly slope, followed by a little rivulet of dislodged stones. We found him gazing into vacancy, apparently quite unhurt, murmuring dully over and over to himself the Muslim formula, designed for times of stress: "Verily to God do we belong, verily to Him do we return."

"But not just yet," I said, laughing, shaking him by the shoulder. "Did you never tumble down ravines in Schamyl's time?"

Then the old man slowly raised himself, and decided that his journey to Paradise might be delayed yet awhile. Our friends of the colliding caravan flung us a rope made of twisted hair, which hauled us all to the

roadway again, and with the renaissance of our servant came the desire of our drivers to be off. We had wasted hours already, they said, and they were not paid by the hour, but by the distance between each post-station.

Our little friend had recovered considerably. He smiled at us wanly, and began a long speech of thanks and gratefulness. How do I know? Well, there is but one way of saying "Thank you," and its Volapuk is known to all nations, only some use it so seldom they almost forget its vocabulary.

I answered him in English and said we were glad the brandy had done so much good, and we wished he would always drink some when he tumbled off carts and hurt his elbow badly. Whereon he smiled again, and we all understood each other perfectly.

Just as his great cart got started for Tiflis the recovered Tatar, quite chirpy now, delved into the mysteries of a bag hanging below the axle, and extricated a black lambskin, the Astrakhan of our home furriers, and a bit of something resembling coal. These he bestowed on us with a flourish, and that we should not quarrel, or waste our time in drawing lots until each got what the other wanted, he gave the skin to Cecily and the black substance to me. I found out afterwards that it was a piece of gargat, a sort of jet found in Daghestan. The word, I think, is most probably a corruption of the Greek "Gargai," the name of the town in Asia Minor where jet was first obtained.

As the moving fourgons passed out of sight our

patient waved to us, waved and waved, like a Manx tripper on a *char-à-banc*, until he was lost to sight.

My thoughts turned to a prosaic subject—food! It seemed a long time since the last meal. Our driver had been drinking sour milk out of a skin bottle at intervals, and folding up pieces of “bread” of the thickness and appearance of strong brown paper, which he called “Lovasch,” into tight wads of a convenient size for swallowing.

By the time we got to Ananaur it was almost dark. We had made ridiculously slow progress, as a Russian would count it, owing to posting-house delays and Ali Ghirik’s collision. The distance covered since early morning totalled seventy versts, all of them more or less up hill.

We were so jarred by the constant rack and rampage of the woeful conveyance that we decided on halting for the night “right there,” as Americans say, whatever the accommodation, and give over trying to sustain the road records which our man told us of scathingly. He said we ought to have accomplished the whole journey in twenty-four or thirty hours at least, and was very offended because we would not continue on to Mleti, miles away, the proper post-house at which to outspan.

The specimens of resting-places of the Georgian Road are considered to be the *dernier cri* of luxury, and certainly contrasted with the prehistoric shelters come upon elsewhere in the wilds. These rather comfortless places are sybaritic in their hang-the-expense extravagances. On this most important route through the

heart of the Caucasus one finds amazing luxuries, and if the insects—the most case-hardened veterans in the world—will allow you, there is nothing to prevent your sleeping indefinitely. Nobody will call you. Attendance is not a strong point in these primitive parts.

The well-built Ananaur *auberge* provided all sorts of unusual remnants of civilization. Mattresses, and even coverlets of sorts, although we were too cowardly to tackle them. We had a room, too, safe from the eruptions of other wayfarers. No small boon this.

After contriving an excellent supper we removed all the bed trappings, and lay down upon the soft prayer-mats we had brought with us, as being less bulky than mattresses, wrapped up in our bourkas.

To say the beds were hard in a denuded condition was to say little. I tried the floor at last, and found it at least less lumpy.

A terrific storm brewing on the snowfields broke in majesty, and tore through the valley, shrieking and hissing like a demon army. Peels of thunder echoed in the hills like salvos of artillery. For two or three hours the tempest raged, driving the rain before its gusty breath. Then, as the night died, the rush and the roar sank to nothingness.

Ananaur has two old churches enclosed in a strong fortress wall which dominates the roadway, and the little town is immortalized by its connexion with the last years of a famous King of Georgia, Irakli, the "thunderbolt of all Transcaucasia," of whom Frederic the Great exclaimed, "*Moi en Europe, et en Asie l'invincible Hercule, roi de Georgie.*"

Irakli was on the throne when the Persians sacked Tiflis in 1795, and to the sanctuaries of Ananaur the valorous Georgian fled after his defeat by the vast forces of Aga Mahommed Khan. From Ananaur the old King sallied forth to gather together the remnants of his army, whom he led to victory, re-entering ruined and desolated Tiflis a month after its capture by the invaders.

We had ordered our tarantass to be ready by 7.30 a.m., counting on the usual dilatoriness of the country, and lo! the conveyance was ready for us only a quarter of an hour behind time. So we boarded the torturer again, still very stiff from the effects of the shaking the day before.

Every nation has its representative word or sentence. With the English it is the pervading "All right!" The Caucasian equivalent—a present from Russia—is "Sayetchass!" meaning "At once" or "Directly." It is used as a pacifier under all circumstances of haste and requirement and conveys simply nothing. Unless you have what the Bard calls "the soft grace and sovereign aid of patience," you had better not travel in the Caucasus at all, "for "Sayetchass" will drive you to desperation or home. The amiable lower-class Russian who harnesses up at the post-houses is the slowest moving thing on earth next to the tortoise.

The ascent of the beautiful valley ahead taxed our horses considerably, poor miserable bags of bones that they were. One longed to turn them loose in the great harvest tracts of rye which curved up the sides of the hills in a belt of gold to the timber line where beeches, oaks, and birch trees grew in serried ranks.

Here and there in the hollows the purple of small vineyards glowed, and round one atom of a place where the low-growing vines could hardly hold the weight of fruit a strong stockade was built of engirdling up-standing staves, interlaced together. A protection, our servant said, when we inquired, against "the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines," as the Singer of the Song of Songs hath it. Only Ali Ghirik did not put it like that. He had never heard of Solomon.

The Aragva River ran beside us, meagre and white and dull-looking, and from little plateaux and pin-nacles rising above the forest quaint old ruinous towers peeped down.

From Ananaur to Pasanaur—twenty-one versts, the longest stage betwixt stations *en route*—the road rises considerably to the prettily situated post-house set in a maze of woods just where the valley begins to narrow. Pasanaur is an old Persian name, and means Holy Hill, but what makes it sacred I cannot tell you. It is sanctified somehow, but wherefore is lost in the mists of the ages.

Onwards to Mleti, climbing laboriously. Far, far above us, on the crests of granitic cliffs, Ossete auls, or villages, clung. That well-graced Russian singer, Pushkin, with poetical imagery, said that the distant grey hives reminded him of swallows' nests.

At Mleti we changed horses again, this time coming off with a much better lot. The post-house, also, ran to a most superior luncheon, set out in a dining-room rich in masses of paper flowers. With your eyes half closed and the aid of a little imagination,

the general *tout ensemble* was singularly reminiscent of the coffee-room of some popular Hydropathic establishment at home. Two English ladies, feasting at a near-by table, attended by what we took to be husbands, as they never addressed a word to one another the whole time, fostered the illusion. They were of the pronounced "Hydro. beagle" type. We tried to fraternize and discover why and wherefore they were in the back of beyond like ourselves, but they were too conventionally freezing to allow of the acquaintance ripening. Of course, we had "not been introduced."

The little Georgian village was very pretty, and arrestingly situated at the foot of a precipitous mountain wilderness, our route to the crest of the Pass. Mleti lacks ancient churches and a connexion with Noah. Its past is quite present. In fact, from a Caucasian point of view, it has, as Matthew Arnold said of Mr. Ichabod Wright's translation of Homer, "no proper reason for existing."

Now we zigzagged up a sheer gaunt precipice, the ingeniously-contrived left to right, right to left cuts in the face of the Titanic wall alone permitting a successful negotiation of the forbidding rampart. Sombre mountains, with deep snow lying in the hollows, gloomed above us, curving away into shadowy mist-wreaths.

The well-known half-laughing cry of a migratory kestrel rang out over the scarped heights. Far above us he flew steadily, then hovered awhile with his beautiful rapid wing movement, to sail away next instant in motionless grace. A curving evolution brought him up to a stationary perfection of balance,

and down, down he dropped out of our sight, in swift sharp impulse, a Nemesis to some poor wandering field mouse.

It took us just two hours and forty minutes to clamber up the fourteen and a half versts between Mleti and Gaudaur, and because the horses had all to do and the yamschik nothing, the latter, a very intelligent specimen, turned round and told Cecily in quick Russian why Gaudaur is so called. He recounted the story with the air of one who has sprung it often before and was very pleased with it. The word Gaudaur, he said, is a compound of aul, which means "village" in Ossetia, and Gaud, the name of the mountain spirit of the region, whose romantic love-story our garrulous friend retailed for our benefit. And here it is for yours.

Once upon a time, in this aul set on the highlands, a most beautiful girl lived, and she was so lovely that every passing caravan brought her some bright piece of silk, or gay scarf, or glittering jewel for the sheer unselfish joy of adding lustre to already peerless charms. Nina was the Circe of the whole district, and everyone fell in love with her. The great Spirit Gaud loved her most of all, and from her childhood had tempered the ice-touched winds for her, watched over her comings, guarded her goings. If she went out on the mountain slopes to bring the goats home, lo! the grim grey rocks and knife-edged stones gave place to a soft carpet of moss beneath her tiny feet, flowers bloomed for her where no blossoms ever flourished. This protective admiration even extended itself to

Nina's entire family. Her father's flocks increased and multiplied until the hill-sides were peppered white with their numbers; her sisters married the most influential surrounding chiefs, and her brothers overcame all enemies in battle. Nina, of course, knew very well that her fascinations had exercised their wonted charm, but womanlike she chose to affect ignorance, and let it be known that she was on the look-out for a likely Ossete suitor. Perhaps she thought a Spirit-husband would pall after a while. But as to this the yamschik would not enlighten us. When we interrupted he sulked for two or three minutes ere he would resume the yarn again.

Gaud evolved the brilliant idea of masquerading as an Ossete warrior, and by his valour winning Nina's love for himself alone, but, unfortunately, before the scheme could be carried into effect the girl met her fate in a fine upstanding youth named Sasycho, a really heroic-looking Ossete who could outdo all his fellows in shooting, riding, and dancing. And that meant a lot in a tribe who are all terpsichorean artists, all fair equestrians, and all brilliant marksmen.

The Mountain Spirit and the Green-Eyed Monster joined forces, and proceeded to lead Sasycho a terrible life. Snowstorms, avalanches, rocks, and fogs beset the young man, and it became quite unsafe for anyone to remain in his company for long. Only the intrepid Nina was regardless. Gaud might rage, but there it was! The girl and Sasycho were always together.

In his wrath the Spirit called an extra special avalanche to his aid, and the great sweeping snow-

slide obediently descended on Nina's paternal hut on a day when the lovers had it all to themselves. They didn't mind the catastrophe in the least, and hailed the unexpected gift of many unchaperoned hours with delight. They built up the wood fire, discussed their future, and talked lover talk until, as the hours flew by, they realized they were desperately hungry, and unknowingly, in one fell swoop, they ate up the entire food supply of the establishment.

By next day the ill-starred lovers were in a terrible fix. Hunger and thirst tormented them. Here Cecily threw the yamschik off again by asking: "But why thirst? Surely they could have melted some of the superabundance of snow."

No help came. Gaud prevented that. And then "a strange thing happened." Sasycho, who was prowling round and round like a starving prairie wolf, instead of thinking, as a good lover would, how on earth he could get food for his famishing beloved, decided on making a meal of her himself! He rushed at Nina and buried his strong white teeth in her shoulder.

At this tremendous moment the door opened and Nina's father and brothers hurried to the rescue. The lovers, of course, were lovers no longer. As Cecily translated it to me, they "took an unaccountable aversion to each other," but from Nina's point of view the dislike, one would imagine, was wholly understandable. A lover who buries his teeth in one's shoulder when desperately hungry could not be an acquisition anywhere, not even in a place like—but I had better not

mention names. There aren't any lovers there, because there aren't any men, only hordes of old maids.

Gaud was so delighted at the death of his love's infatuation that he laughed and laughed until the loosened rocks rained down into the valley like pebbles, the very rocks which you can see for yourself to-day.

"That was the result of the Mountain Spirit's laughter," said the little yamschik solemnly.

Crossing the Krestovaya Gora, or Cross Pass, 7977 feet above sea-level, we were on the undulating watershed of the Caucasus, with surprisingly little view, save behind us. Mountains hemmed us in on every side.

I always think "watershed" such an enigmatical word. It is a conjurer too, and brings before your eyes things it is not, and can never be. I like best Mr. Belloc's definition of it. A child could understand it. "All countries," he says, "are built in vast planes which lean up against one another, and have ridges between. The great rivers run in the hollows where these planes meet at their lowest, and the watersheds are the lines along which their top edges come together." Is it not a delightful explanation? "The watersheds are the lines along which their top edges come together."

We were on "the top edge" of the Caucasus!

At the very highest point stands a large stone cross, set to mark the altitude and to give point to the name Krestovaya Gora. What an acquisition the majestic title would be to the list of our suburban villa names! Krestovaya on one gate-post, and Gora on the other, would put out of court all the other attempts at breaking the record.

CHAPTER XII

OVER THE GREAT CHAIN

The ground, the books, the academes
From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire.

Love's Labour's Lost.

THE wonderful Vayenno-Gruzinskaya Dorōga, Georgian Military Road, claimed our admiration every minute. It is true that the dust was feet deep, and in bad weather would certainly be a quagmire, but traffic is incessant. The road was opened for public use in 1861, and cost, it is said, somewhere about £4,000,000. For many years the track—one of the highest in the world—was the main highway which linked up Russia with her territory on the southern side of the Caucasian range. The railway from Moscow came to an abrupt end at Vladikavkaz, northern outpost of the rampart mountain wall, but the quite recent extension of the line by way of Petrolfsk to Baku gave travellers the chance of avoiding the mountain route, for at the Oil City the Transcaucasian railroad joins up, thus placing Tiflis or Batoum in get-at-able proximity.

The traffic, therefore, over the great road is not so heavy as in the royal days following on its completion, but it is still considerable, and in the best months of the year large numbers of horses are in readiness—or

what masquerades in the Caucasus for readiness—at the various post-stations.

The Pass was ever a well-known one to the Muscovite, and in the days of Peter the Great the armies of Russia set their faces to the land beyond. Wild men of the mountains, holding their fierce defiles, contested every forward step, the impeding glacier-fed torrents, the brooding avalanche, engulfments of all kinds claimed full toll, and the profound cleft in the heart of the Titanic barrier is a sepulchre of a mighty human host. The wraiths of fallen hundreds line the way from end to end.

In the earliest years of Russian occupation a system of block-houses and patrols paved the way, to some extent, for travellers, but the activity of the unconquered tribesmen made a safe journey an impossible thing. Eight miles a day was considered good going, and that with a protective convoy numbering hundreds. This condition of affairs held apparently up to 1829, for we have the chronicle of Pushkin, who vividly described the difficulties and dangers of a trip through the Caucasus at that period.

From the crest of the Pass to Kobi the wide track wound through cavernous tunnels, whose echoes in clanging tongues beat to the rhythm of our horses, flying hoofs, then through wildernesses of oddly-shapen rocks curving above the road, and out again to the shadow of snow-crowned pinnacles.

Beyond Kobi the scene merged into still wilder beauties. To the east the peaks of the great chain rose tier on tier to the sky; Kasbek and his brothers

in the west veiled their glories in banks of filmy clouds.

It was late afternoon, when, after crossing the Terek by an iron bridge, we rolled into the mountain hollow where the Georgian village of Kasbek lies, 11,000 feet below the mountain giant of the name, whose snowy cone is 16,533 above sea-level.

In the days of Georgian supremacy Kasbek was known as Mkiunvari, the Ice Mountain, and the village as Stephan's-minda, St. Stephen's, but since the advent of the Russians the poetical synonyms have died out, and the peak, the village, and the district generally are known as Kasbek, the name of a princely family of the region.

The post-house looked very civilized, and the little village, too, quite pretentious with make-believe streets ending in *culs-de-sac*, and curious old square towers to some of the houses, relics of the lively days before the Muscovite occupation, when the tribes lived in a state of perpetual alarms and forays.

We had hoped to find Mount Kasbek clear of the mist which veiled its summit, and as the postmaster held out certain prospects of a dispersal we decided to halt for the night and wait the longed-for transformation. The clouds envelop the mountain, our host told us, all through the heat of the day, but a northerly wind clears away the vapour like magic.

We had tea, brewing it in our little teapot, English-fashion, drinking it from cups, and adding condensed milk, to the interest of a trio of Russian ladies awaiting a change of horses. They would taste the concoction,

and did not like it. They said they supposed the English took tea less frequently than did their nation, if the drink tasted anything like our brew.

Then—the voice of the charmer, Ali Ghirik, bidding us come out at once and see what was going on upon the mountain. The transformation had begun. He had the makings of a born “conductor,” our henchman, and was never so happy as when introducing us to novelties. If he could but put the hands of the clock back a few years, or find that wonderful well of youth Rabelais told us of, there would be no end to his energies.

The mist was rolling upwards, crushing its foamy banks into a solid compact mass. The lower slopes revealed themselves, dull-toned, and uninteresting in bareness, quite ugly in their grey desolation.

Then, as we watched, almost as though a magician’s wand touched it, the panorama of snow covering the mountain three-quarters of the way down took on a rainbow of tints. Up, up rose the vaporous shroud until at last the solemn grand bulk stood in clear-cut majesty.

Much of the charm and elusive allurements of mighty Kasbek lies in its enveloping mystery, its ancient mythical history. Caucasian folk-lore peoples its dark severe slopes with weird animals, countless gnomes and giants, and brooding eagles whose feathers are an armoured network of golden scales. It is a fairyland. Spirits of all kinds haunt the summit, and here Abraham sought the simple life!

To us the whisper of the wind in the vast hollows,

the toss and churn of the rushing torrent, the dawn, the noon, the evening, every sense of the region seemed to pulsate with one name, and that name Prometheus, Prometheus, Prometheus ! For on the scarped heights of snow-clad Kasbek—an everlasting monument—the earth-born Titan, who gave to mortals the bountiful gift of fire, hung for hundreds of years. Those deep ice valleys once resounded with the clang of Vulcan's hammer as the lame smith-god riveted the chains of martyrdom at the bidding of offended Jupiter. The grim grey rock rising from the encircling snow was the alighting place of the ravening vulture, cruel as death ; on that plateau stood valiant Hercules, his lion skin about him, as he stooped to break the captive's gyves at last.

Hovering over the valley, a dark blur against the whiteness, sailed a stately lammergeyer, whirling and circling in slow strength and grace, a mysterious spirit of the wild. This vulture is very common in all parts of the Caucasus, and it is an old superstition in the country that the man who kills a lammergeyer dies the death himself within forty days. A falconer in Tiflis told me that in the days of Persian occupation the belief was general, as it is to-day in Persia, that if the shadow of the *huma* or lammergeyer fell athwart a person's head it meant a kingdom for the lucky shadowed one. From this superstition, my acquaintance told me, is derived the Persian adjective *humayun*, meaning royal, or kingly.

The postmaster joined us on the roadway. It was for us, he said, speaking in Russian, that Kasbek had





unveiled. Frequently the mountain lies hidden for weeks together. Then, in a quick change from the sublime to the ridiculous, he begged us to return within the house and taste some cheese. The establishment was renowned for the excellence and flavour of its cheese.

We viewed the mass of material resembling a conglomeration of fermenting cream with some suspicion. Why this anxiety for us to consume local cheese—before our dinner, too? It was unfriendly of us to doubt, but in these degenerate days the milk of human kindness is so often full of pestilent microbes, and it is as well to go warily. However, the only desire our host had in connexion with his much-vaunted mixture was the whole-hearted one of, as Lancashire people say, “getting without it.”

Late that night, standing outside the post-station ere we tackled our hard couches, and waged the inevitable war on the insect life of the country, our eyes turned to Kasbek again. The grim snow-crowned head, wreathed about its lower slopes in undulating mist, was outlined in clear-cut silhouette against a luminous ultramarine sky. Mystery and majesty surrounded it like an aura. And set high among the gods, on the verge of the great swath of light trailing in a Milky Way across the heavens, shone immortal Hercules, gleaming and glorious.

All through the night the rumble of wheels and the noise of changing horses disturbed us—the sort of thing our ancestors living in the old posting era had to put up with. What with the constant traffic and the

agility of the "domestic chamois," we snatched but little sleep, and rose early in order to do some prospecting around the village.

The cold was intense. I know I am plagiarizing Dr. Cook, but it can't be helped. The cold was intense. The light rain of the night had frozen on the edge of the verandah, and the road was as hard as iron. A change indeed from the oven-like Tiflis.

Crossing the foaming Terek we tried to walk through a little village guarded by the efficacious dogs peculiar to the Caucasus. They were wild and fierce enough for anything, but Ali Ghirik, who never left us or forsook us, said that it was appearance merely, and the animals' looks bewrayed them.

"I know they will not bite. I know they will not bite," he kept repeating over and over.

In this sorry scheme of things entire the Great Solution of all things is only to be found through knowledge. The too trusting one was bitten rather badly in the hand, and Cecily and I just saved ourselves by a flank movement which flung us right into the protecting doorway of a little flat-roofed, one-roomed hut, amid a group of interested Russians, father, mother, babies, and the baboushka, and thus, willy-nilly, for the first time we met the indispensable adjunct to the properly-conducted Russian household of the lower class.

She, the baboushka, i.e. grandmother, is as necessary as the samovar. Every family owns one, or did, for as customs change, giving place to new, the baboushka is not so fashionable as once on a time, but the dwellers

in the great waste places need her yet. She is their cook, housemaid, nurse, doctor, woodcutter, gardener, samovar-lighter—all! Nominally the mother of the householder, she is sometimes his mother-in-law; or again she may be remotely akin to the relative who goes on tour with the self-respecting English actress, a mother by adoption. Her age is always unfathomable. She looks seventy years young, but she may be a hundred old. Her lined good-humoured face tells little. From morning to night she works patiently until she creeps tired out to her own little reservation on top of the *petchka*, or oven. Even-temper seems to come with *baboushka* honours, for the younger specimens of lower-class Russian femininity are not strikingly amiable.

A meal was just about to commence, and presently the little ones turned their attention from us to black bread and onions. A much greater attraction!

It is customary for casual travellers to observe the peculiar dullness and stupidity of the Russian peasant, whom they immerse in a slough of ignorance which is described as unparalleled elsewhere. The uneducated Muscovite is certainly excessively unintelligent-looking, unless it is that the great sculptor Environment who models the clay of their lives has chiselled their features into a mask expressionless as the lives themselves.

Let it pass.

Our own lower orders are not the brilliant mechanisms that vote-culling politicians at electioneering times would have us believe. Sometimes I wonder if the

Russian moujik is so very far behind the English peasant in the tortoise race. Our ignoramuses progress as fast as our preachers and reformers will allow them, and it is much the same in Russia.

Nailed up on the wooden wall of the tiny dwelling was the household icon, a brilliant oleograph of a saint set in a tawdry gilt frame, and before it on a primitive bracket a little light flickered in a saucer of oil, like a drowning glow-worm. Some sort of an illumination flames before the icon in every household, and icons from one to a dozen are in every room. Sometimes they are heirlooms, dark and dirty with age and lack of a duster.

To the moujik his sacred picture ranks above all other of his *lares et penates*. "If your house takes fire save the icon and samovar first, and then, if you have time, the children," is an old saying, and a good one, too, an old man told us, for "there are plenty of children; children are easily come by, but a samovar costs some roubles, and the Saints would show anger if an icon was burnt."

Many of the flat-topped roofs were summer gardens all a-blowing and a-growing. Small vegetables sprouted from a few inches of soil, but potatoes we saw none of. The dwellings with agricultural aspirations were not Muscovite habitations. It is the Tatar who husbands his resources so carefully. The pioneer instinct, the desire to be a settler, to see things grow, to sow for the sake of the reaping, is lacking in the Russian temperament. And that proverb about scratching a Russian and finding a Tatar was manufactured by an ignoramus.





AL. PASS

The Tatar and the Russian are dissimilar beings, scratched or unscratched.

Before noon we were in our jolting shay again careering along the remarkable road, a sort of Caucasian Canadian-Pacific adapted for wheel traffic. Often the well-metalled track was cut into the very face of the gaunt cliff, whose cloven sides curved high above our heads and fell to unfathomable depths below. Here and there the road was roofed in for snow-slides.

Eight or ten miles below Kasbek the peaks converge, as though guarding some treasure, on the historical Darial Pass, a pass which is not really a pass at all, but a well-defined gorge. This savage defile, with its solemnity of silence, broken only by the wild music of the torrent, has been described so often that I must not add my quota to the numerous word-pictures we have of it. Some writers tell us that their first sight of the scene of desolation, of the great barring precipices and riven crags, rising to 4000 feet above the gorge, was a disappointment. I place the romantic glen high among the wonders of the Caucasus. No modern description has conveyed its awesome loneliness, its sombre grey stillness, and chill fierce aspect. Virgil, with his fortuitous "*Duris cautibus horrens Caucasus,*" encompassed it as no one else has ever done.

Just as Blücher exclaimed when he first saw London, "What a city to loot!" so must the traveller rushing through the Darial think, "What a place to hold!" An Horatius could achieve it against the onslaughts of an army.

And how it has been held !

After passing Lars, quite an imposing post-station, a storm of hail and swinging whips of rain drove against us, and in the mist the rate at which we travelled was not without its dangers. Often the conveyance shot down into a black-mouthed cave from which there seemed no outlet or escape ; then a little winding riband opened in the rocks and led on to a slumberous valley a-fire with crimson poppies, many-hued gentians, and beautiful fern fronds waving amid the stones.

So to the open steppe country whereon lies Vladikavkaz, which important town we reached in the late evening, just as the sun was setting, tinting the white summits on the northern side of the range to pinnacles of gold.

Kasbek lifted his snowy crest 14,000 feet above us, and far away to the westward gleamed mighty Koshantau, in the ascent of which, when the peak was known as Dykhtau, the two English climbers, Messrs. Donkin and Fox, lost their lives in 1888. Since their day Russian geographers have transposed the mountain monarchs, and that which had been Dykhtau became Koshantau, Koshantau, Dykhtau.

Our train for Suvorovskaya, on the line to Rostov, was not scheduled to leave Vladikavkaz until nearly midnight, so we sampled the most pretentious hotel in the place and had a real clean up, and dinner.

Then we strolled down the wide cobble-stoned streets to the Boulevard laid out by the side of the Terek River, to which the fascinations of a droning band had attracted a motley crowd, who wandered



VLADIKAVKAZ

around the gaily lighted kiosks or sat on forms criticizing the passers-by, just as we do in Hyde Park. Though many nations were represented, the medley was not so cosmopolitan as in Tiflis. Most of the men and boys were in uniform, and, like Church Congress time in London, priests were everywhere. They were of the long-haired Russian variety, in purple or black cassocks.

Somehow or other Vladikavkaz reminded me of Winnipeg as I saw it sixteen years ago. It has the same look of the beginnings of things. But Vladikavkaz has left off at the commencement era, and Winnipeg has forgotten it.

In the refreshment room at the station we discovered Ali Ghirik, drinking glasses of tea, and presently we were aboard the smoothly-running train, crowded with passengers, Russians mostly, journeying to the health resort Pjatigorsk.

The car was far too congested to be comfortable, and the Muscovite powers of conversation, exercised as they are in season and out, made even a pretence of sleep impossible. To watch their eager, animated gestures and the earnest interest bestowed on their every subject, you would say that the affairs of nations were in process of adjustment. But Cecily reported of the chattering feminines that their talk was all about servants, husbands, and children, exactly as it always is with us.

Before Mineralaya, where passengers alight for Pjatigorsk, the dawn broke in a burst of glory, flecking the grey clouds with pink and gold. The first rays of

the rising sun caught the glittering snows of Elbruz, outlining the frosty heights against a softly luminous sky, and out of the waste of shadowy desolation a rampart line of "star-neighbouring summits" curved east and west in serried companies.

As we gazed and gazed on the splendid scene, the jealous low-hanging clouds covered the high peaks.

Elbruz is the Russian name, Minghi-Tau, White Mountain, by which the Titan of the Caucasus is known to the older natives, is Turkish. Not always in his nomenclature does the Muscovite "better what is done." Minghi-Tau is a much more beautiful description than harsh-sounding Elbruz.

The mountain has a mysterious summit guardian in the shape of a Chantecler quite *à la* Rostand, a gigantic bird of wondrous plumage, who crows triumphantly as the dawn breaks, "My Sunrise!" flapping his wings the while to scare away all intruders.

This strident-voiced cock looms large in the folklore of the Caucasus, save that he does not in every region salute the sunrise only. There is a brazen-throated specimen who crows throughout the midnight hours at certain seasons, the Tatar Bairam for one, when every evil spirit is powerless, and hides away in the thorn brakes, low to earth, afraid.

There is nothing new under the sun, even in far Caucasia. Did not the Immortal One tell us of this bird of dawning, which "singeth all night long?"

"And then they say no spirit stirs abroad,
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm."

In the great caverns and ice-clefts of Elbruz spell-bound giants live, poor monsters fettered for lack of worldly knowledge. Only one human being in all the ages has penetrated the recesses where the enchanted spirits live, and he, though he was clever enough to get there, was a poor unlettered Abkhasian, who was no good as a missionary at all.

Legendary lore says that the tallest giant addressed the visitor in the usual pedantic giant language.

“O, child of man in the upper world, who hast dared to thrust thy presence here, tell us how lives the race of men? Is woman still true to man? Is love the fulfilling of the law? Is the daughter still obedient to her mother?”

The foolish native, apparently ignorant of the immemorial rules for the salving of enchanted giants, stupidly replied that he supposed so, whereon every one of the great creatures fell to crying bitterly, and, gnashing their teeth in approved fashion, said that under the idyllic circumstances prevailing overhead they would all, of course, have to continue to dree their enchanted weird to its miserable end.

They say—that elusive will-o'-the-wisp, mightiest of all reporters, save Moses, and he was the greatest reporter the world will ever know—that a tender-hearted member of the Alpine Club has broken the prison bars at last by tipping a copy of Lady Cardigan's *Recollections* down a chink in the grand plateau of Elbruz, but I can't tell you if the tale is true. I simply lay it before the Copenhagen of your judgment. Men are disbelievers ever. Only the other day I read

somewhere or other that dear old Sir John Mandeville never existed, much less "ryghte merveylously travyled," and Marco Polo, instead of being rated as the greatest explorer of his age, was dismissed as its ablest Ananias! After this it seemed quite natural to think of Columbus of immortal memory dying in fetters, branded as a romancer and a cheat.

He was a philosopher, indeed, who said that all men willingly believe what they wish to believe. So—poor spell-bound spirits of Elbruz, you are free at last! Unknown member of the Alpine Club, I thank thee!

From Mineralaya we practically had the train to ourselves, and after a picnic breakfast we glued our eyes on the landscape, which was filled by the bold peak of Beschtai, rising above the group of his brothers.

At Suvorovskaya station—a terrific name for such a place!—post-carts were waiting for us, three of them, all of telega variety driven by wild men, "bearded like pards," to whom not even the linguist Ali could speak.

Seeing the luggage securely fastened on to one bone-shaker, we got into another and sat on the floor, holding on tightly to the gunwale as the box-like contraption started with a jerk over a "road" which was nothing but the open unbroken steppe.

The word steppe is a little befogging to those who haven't seen the type of country it represents, for it irresistibly conjures up a waste of sun-baked land stretching away to the horizon in unending miles. As a matter of fact, steppe country is not necessarily flat. Sometimes, indeed, it is of a rolling conformation, set high, perhaps, on elevated plateaux, or it may be

fertile, yielding rich harvests. Here and there it is frank, undisguised desert, where apologetic thorn bushes struggle for life amid a sandy stone-strewn surface.

Steppe country is always treeless, and yet, for all that, it may be very, very beautiful. If you admire that wild waste of land lying near Penrith, that low rolling country, curving to the foot of the Fells, green patched with brown, grass tufts and sandy ways, the vast silent steppes would appeal to you.

The jolting of our miserable vehicle bereft us of powers of speech, and we could do nothing but cling to the sides like shipwrecked mariners storm-tossed in a coracle. A rain of dislodged hairpins rattled about us.

To the horizon line the burnt-up expanse was purpled by a low-growing diminutive plant with feathery stems covered with blooms, a statice of sorts. The lumpy hillocks were no bar to us. Over them we sped, crushing the blossoms ruthlessly in our headlong flight.

At intervals of a few miles we noticed the flat roosting-places from which the Cossack sentries are supposed to keep a look-out over the face of the country for untoward happenings. These eyries, built to a height of some twenty feet, are reached by ladders, but we only saw one man at his post, or near it. He lay at the foot of the ladder, fast asleep.

Crossing the Kuma River—I do think it is such a mistake to have so many similar names as they have in the Caucasus, and betrays, too, such a lack of

inventive faculty—once by a rickety Irish-looking bridge, once by a shallow ford, we drove into a cultivated region where fields of maize and sunflowers grew.

If you have only seen solitary sunflowers, or at most twos and threes, upturned to the sun in some English garden, you can have no idea of the glory of fifty acres of massed sun-worshippers. All facing slightly to the east, sown in rows, hilled up like potatoes, myriads of them.

The sunflower is a very important vegetable in Russia, and a good crop is worth one hundred roubles an acre. Everybody, everywhere, nibbles sunflower seeds, and in the towns they are peddled at street corners as are pea-nuts in America, and chestnuts and ice-cream in England.

A little stanitza, as the Russian villages are called, crowned a rising hill ahead. Small, whitewashed, green-roofed houses grouped themselves about a tiny church. There was, of course, no post-house in these parts, for there was no road, but our driver swung us up to the most pretentious dwelling and stopped with a jerk.

The Starshina, an unkempt, unwashed individual, welcomed us in Russian, and seemed electrified to be replied to in that tongue. All the time he conversed he fingered a string necklace he wore, from which was suspended an amulet—most pagan of relics—a bat's wing dried to tinder, to which was also attached a small wooden cross. The old heathen faith dies hard. Does it ever die? Can it ever die? Not, I

think, until we learn to place education before religion, since we know they do not always go hand in hand.

The entire village left off doing nothing to come and look at us. The feminine element were all clad in the hottest shade of red, and big blue and white aprons. One old lady, after inspecting us from every side, from every hillock of vantage, said something delightedly and clapped her hands as if in applause, though wherefore I cannot tell. It could not have been our personal appearance, which can only be described as dirty in the extreme. Whatever it was it seemed a most charming greeting, with its subtle touch of flattery. Of course, a pessimist might have taken it differently.

Never did I see so many pigeons congregated together as the vast flocks which devastated and despoiled this village. They toddled through the crowd like chickens, perched everywhere, dominated everything. All this because the bird is sacred to the Russian peasant. He will tell you it is not so, that the pagan days when pigeons were sacred to Perun, the god of thunder, have long since passed ; but the bird is immune for all that, and no moujik, however hungry, will tackle one for dinner. The shadow of the Cross has more or less obliterated Perun, but the mantle of the Spirit has descended on another. By some system of mental jugglery the ubiquitous pigeon is now consecrated to St. Nicholas, or, as some say, to St. Elias, the peasant's weather prophet.

The Starshina asked us into his abode, which had a decided list to starboard, and, like a doll's house, its front, being very dilapidated, was practically open to

the street. "Nitchevo!" Never mind! It will be mended in God's good time.

We displayed, though quite unasked, our *otkrytyjlist*, or open letter, which desired all whom it might concern to assist us, and see that we were provided with an escort, if necessary,—a quite superfluous luxury in these civilized days.

The first real break we made was failing to cross ourselves before the icons, and this omission so upset our host that he covered up our defection by crossing himself continuously whenever we addressed him. Soon his fears overcame him, and, prompted by the hovering *baboushka*, he would know if we were Antichrists, come to "steal away the souls of the family."

He was a person of importance—the *Starshina*, and grew enough sunflowers to support seven souls, himself, his wife, the *baboushka*, and four little children.

A Gargantuan stove filled the little room, tiled on the top, upon which the whole family slept o' nights, two deep, I suppose, as there was not sufficient ground-space to accommodate them all side by side. A rough table, chairs, three samovars, and a cupboard completed the outfit, and, of course, icons, with tapers burning in cups of oil.

The *Nicholai* icon had a small loaf of white bread before it, lest any departed member of the family, feeling hungry, should be secreted behind this most popular of all the icons. A plain personage, *Nicholai*—very. In one hand he carried a sword, in the other a whole church—evidently a *Sandow* among the saints.

All the icons occupied a sacred shelf farthest from the door, facing the stove, and the Starshina told us, when we questioned him, the reservation is called "The Great Corner" or "The Beautiful Corner."

Thus, only he 'didn't know it, the pagan Slavs kept their idols, just as carefully, just as reverently. Paganism has passed. The sacred images, which were enthroned in precisely similar fashion, have given place to holy icons, which are to the moujik equally mysterious, and almost alive—half-animates quite capable of taking a hand in the intricate affairs of the community.

A tray of brown biscuits and saucers full of sour cream were put before us, and presently a steaming samovar and hot cakes of maize appeared. Then a vast supply of boiled mutton made its appearance. It was the truest hospitality. Our good host hovered about us with the assiduity of a mother bird, pressing food on us, heaping our glasses with sugar. When we took two pieces as all-sufficient, he thought we were economizing and would none of it.

We were told that a change of horses had been sent by the Prince for our use. He always returned this way from civilization, it appeared. What a journey to take ere one's country house was reached! We had still some twenty-five miles to go.

An astonishing delay ensued, during which we held a sort of Durbar, which all the inhabitants over four years of age attended.

Time lies forgotten in the Caucasus; the natives, and the Russians, are true Orientals, and simply do

not understand the meaning of the word. Everybody is procrastinating and indifferent; everything which can be postponed is postponed, as also many things that can't. The famous putting-off expression peculiar to Hall Caine's island, "Traa dy liooar!"—Time enough—is altogether outclassed by its Russian counterpart "Zaftra!"—To-morrow.

CHAPTER XIII

A VISIT TO THE PRINCE

Worthy fellows . . . most sinewy sword-men.

All's Well that Ends Well.

Please to enter in the castle.

King Richard II.

THE magic influence and fame of our letters of recommendation spread to a near-by post, and decided the Cossacks on duty that they were our guardians and must go along with us. A batch of six sat their horses patiently, waiting for us to emerge.

We accepted the posse of dustmakers with as good grace as possible, and they at once set to work on illustrating the equestrian entertainment known as the djigitovka, own cousin to the Somali dibáltig, save that in this case swords and not spears formed the basis of the affair.

First, the six dashed in a compact bunch to our front, raising a curtain of dust, then to our flank, with a feint of attacking a powerful enemy, parrying mythical blows on their falchion swords, curveting round and round us, and the whole lot of us travelling like beings possessed. Pandemonium let loose! One intrepid warrior stood on his head, the horse going at a hand gallop the while, then curved over like a bit of stretched

elastic to light on the ground gently as thistledown. All the while he clutched the fire-shovel stirrup in his hand, and by this fragile connexion he, somehow or other, gained the saddle again.

The frenzied rush lasted for quite a few minutes, until with a tug at the cruel Turkish bits the horses sank quivering to their haunches, lathered all over. The interesting show would have gained considerably had it been performed in an open space, with a stationary audience. Contrived as it was on a miserable track running between gigantic limestone rocks, the splendid riding lost much of its effect.

The Cossacks certainly are the most superb horsemen, but they don't strain the quality of mercy much. In fact, of all the peoples of the Caucasus, the Dukhobors alone treat their animals as I should like to be treated were I a horse. But, humanitarianism apart, it is a fine sight to see the Cossack balance and seat, so careless and nonchalant, so completely one with the steed, centaur-like.

I noticed particularly one rider mounted on a half-broken colt, probably fresh from running wild on the steppes. Over and over again the terrified creature reared up and fell backwards with a sickening crash, and each time the agile Cossack slipped off coolly at just the right moment in just the right way, to mount again as the horse struggled to its feet. They all seemed able to bring to an instant stand animals galloping at headlong speed, and although there is such an appearance of carelessness in all these manœuvres, I fancy that great muscular effort is in

reality expended or the men could never keep their seats at all.

Our way trended upwards to a valley set in the spurs of the mountains, and now the scene took on an air of forested luxuriance and every hill slope was green with thickly growing trees.

At the mountain gate of the smiling rift ahead some horses were picketed in a grove of conifers, and brown-garbed figures sitting about a smoky fire called "How-do-you-do's" to our driver, who again pulled up with his usual disconcerting suddenness. It is quite impossible to make a dignified appearance in a cavorting telega.

It is not a mark of respect in the Caucasus to raise your hat to a stranger, man or woman, so it was not strange that our new guides stolidly retained their papaks the while they scrutinized us keenly from every side. Cecily did so wish they would take her in on the left hand only, as she says her profile looks much better from that angle.

Presently everyone set to work hauling the kit from the telegas and piling it on to waiting ponies. Our Cossack friends, well-graced players, left us, the carts also vanished mysteriously round a corner.

Only one man understood Ali Ghirik in the slightest, for everybody talked Karbardan. To this worthy our servant pointed out our English saddles sewn up in their protective casings, and this find interested the little knot of men for quite a long time. How we used them, how we sat them, was a matter for the most earnest conjecture.

Riding astride, of course, was the only method suitable for such wilds, and we made this possible by slipping off the skirts in which we contrived a civilized appearance *en route*, when we stood equipped, as Rosalind said, "all points like a man." Our shooting suits would have much contented us as a permanent fashion, but English ladies in "bifurcated garments," as our advocates of sex equality always describe the sartorial developments of the oppressor, would look odd in Vladikavkaz, for instance, although in Daghestan, and such corners, our knickerbocker kit did not strike the native eye as anything untoward. How could it—when all the fair ladies wore trousers?

It was a difficult business to affix our imported saddles to the horses, who were thin as rails. Fashioned for the portly equines of England, even the top girth hole was far too loose when tried on the spidery skeletons of Karbarda.

Following a guide, who gave the signal to start, Cecily and I set off ahead of the rest, taking a narrow way through a deep cañon with a river rushing down its centre, and wonderfully dense woods on either side. The shade was refreshing after the dust of the day, and now and again an ice-touched wind played through the forest.

Higher we climbed, impeded often by fallen trees and giant reeds, tough as could be, and ever and again we passed beneath umbelliferous blooms, which blossomed at a height of ten feet or more.

The route widened to a great vale of rolling land where oaks of vast girth and ancient beeches stood

beside firs whose highest branches seemed to touch the sky. So deep was this glen that the mountain peaks of the chain, visible up to now, were lost to sight, and all we saw was the interlacing splendour of rampant vegetation. The undergrowth was as thick and wanton and beautiful as the bush in Canada. Raspberries grew in tangled riot; the triumphant hop wound its choking tendrils round the tree stems; a small red plum gleamed amid the green, and everywhere a low-growing, sweet-tasting yellow berry flourished. Ali told us afterwards it was "phaisant-chik," or the autumnal larder of the pheasants.

It was a wonder world. So quiet! So silent! No sound but the soft squelch of our horses' hoofs on the damp moss carpet, or the little thuds of chestnuts dropping to earth. Now and again the peremptory tap-tap-tapping of the woodpecker echoed through the dim aisles. Ah, there he is, the red-crested beauty!

Metallic-coated jays screamed in the pine-tops, a peacock butterfly flaunted his glories across our path, and on a heap of russet leaves a hedgehog lay for dead. I wanted to investigate the prickly atom, but when I essayed to dismount the badly girthed-up saddle slipped its moorings, and in the general excitement and the interest of listening to Karbardan "cuss words" for the first time, I forgot all about my hedgehog friend.

Amid the glow of maize and corn, ripe for the sickle, in a little clearing we came upon two or three small huts made of rough pine stems. I thought they must be the residences of the Prince's keepers, but I found

out later that a little sect of religious enthusiasts had established themselves in this back of beyond, far away from priestly interference. I could not fathom what they called themselves, but their creed was interesting. They believe that a High Power put them into a cruel world solely to find out how to do good, principally to others, and, until the secret of doing good without doing harm is vouchsafed, it is better, think these discouraged adherents, to hide away lest evil is wrought for want of knowledge. The finished product of this quaint sect, if he ever evolves, will go through all kinds of adversities which will purge him of all sin, and then, and then only, will he be ready for final beatification. It is really a sort of Theosophy, perhaps Caucasian Theosophy.

So many of us are Theosophists at heart without the least knowing it. Shakespeare was a Theosophist unawares, and many more intellectual kings whom I could name.

Night began to fall, and our hearts also as we pictured ourselves wandering in this forest maze all through the dark hours. Our guide did not understand a single word we said. Cecily tried him with Russian and I with Manx, but it was all quite hopeless. How far we were from our journey's end we could not guess, and there was nothing to do but follow our leader blindly.

Now we floundered through marshes which flooded above our horses' thighs, so we tossed the stirrups across the saddles and rode Arab-fashion, with bent legs, a very cramping position for long at a time.

After another hour of slow progress we passed between two sentinel rocks on to a rough roadway, evidently a track adapted more or less, rather less than more, for wheel traffic. Clearly, this woodland jaunt of ours was one of those "short cuts" which are always the longest way round in the long run.

The going became easier, for no trees blocked the way, though the night was dark and starless. Our horses seemed to know what they were about, and acted as if the manger was at hand.

A black shadow loomed against a rocky eminence, and a stone entrance, very ruinous, outlined its arch against the gleam of torches held aloft by a silent group of wild-eyed peasants dressed in the robe coat now so familiar. The lurid flare shone on fierce unsmiling faces, and made a pathway of light to guide us to a high stone embrasure, where the Prince stood waiting to receive us. He looked a fitting master for such a primitive feudal stronghold.

"Hail! Thane of Cawdor!" said Cecily laughingly. "I feel exactly as if I had suddenly fallen into the Macbeth era."

Our host gazed at her blankly. The Immortal One is not of the immortals of the Caucasus.

The rooms for our use were down cold, hollow-sounding, narrow, stone passages, and were furnished on the Maple system of decoration, not Macbeth. Thanks be!

The establishment was becoming Russianized, and its master no longer fed with his retainers, as was the custom with the chieftains of old time, but

alone with us. Two sinister-looking individuals waited on us, "buttling" with kinjals at their waists and sheepskin hats on their heads. The Prince, too, clung to his varied arsenal, even indoors. In fact the whole lot of them looked as though they were just ready to repel a German attack, or whatever is the equivalent of predatory Germans in Caucasia, at any moment.

Often the servants joined in the conversation, asking their master questions, about us apparently. There were no maid-servants, but an antiquated lady of the baboushka tribe tottered about the stone passages, scuttling away like a startled rabbit whenever she caught sight of us. We could hear her crooning to herself in a dreary monotone o' nights. I would I knew what her song was all about. Ali Ghirik, whom we instructed to listen and report, said that the prolonged chant was a Russian one, and woven round a drunken berry. It set out to describe that vegetable's feelings as it looked on Kakhétian wine when the latter was red. He couldn't tell us how the berry obtained the wine. It did get it, he maintained, and surely that was enough for us.

We always breakfasted alone, and in spite of its being peculiarly bad taste to look a gift-horse in the mouth, I must say that we had a very un-English, unsatisfying sort of meal. Little brown cakes, sour cream masquerading as butter, and tea, which was also served throughout the day at the very oddest of hours.

At 1 p.m., if we were at home, we dined, always

setting off with the *zakushka*, the Russian idea of *hors-d'œuvre*, laid on a side table, and generally meaning vodka, tomatoes, halves of hard-boiled eggs, and caviare. Not the fresh *swejie ikra*, but the very salt warranted-to-keep variety, such as we mostly get in London restaurants. I am "the general" to whom the flavour of caviare appeals in vain, so I always held back until the soup arrived. Besides, the Prince rather put us off the *zakushka* by his habit of dabbing into every dish indiscriminately with his own fork. One really had to leave the whole collection to him.

The soup was a weird compound of milk, bits of meat, and floating cucumber, which vegetable was also served separately, with sugar. Meat was always mutton, and inevitably boiled. The cheese of the country followed, wine, and, as a very great treat, Guinness's Stout! What Heidsieck is to the dinner giver at home, porter of any brand is to the Caucasian host, and it forms, all over the country, the most valuable, hang-the-expense treat which can be provided for any guest.

Supper was a replica of dinner, and came off about 10 p.m.

The whole "castle" was quite small, and a series of stone erections, not unlike out-sized Kentish oast-houses, strung together with passages. The living-room was furnished with big divans and fine carpets. On the walls hung some beautiful examples of silver-handled poniards, rifles inlaid with gold and silver, old matchlocks, and ancient pistols. Fine trophies there were also—some grand specimens of bison, leopards,

ibex, and ollen, all marred by the atrocious setting up. They were "home-cured" with a vengeance!

Across the roof of the vaulted hall a sentence was engraven in Greek characters on a rough beam. The Prince translated it for us: "God hath made all men to be happy."

"So you read the old Stoic, Prince?" I queried, with interest.

"I read nothing. Books are for people who cannot think. I prefer," he went on, unconsciously quoting Schopenhauer, "to do my own thinking."

The little philosophy of Epictetus had been painted by a wandering Greek artist who passed a spell of bad weather so. He was a bit of a wag, I suspect, and meant it as a sly dig at his sombre, unsmiling entertainers.

The Prince's face wore a perpetual look of sustained worry. In moments of forgetfulness he joked, but always with the gravity of the game at heart. He had long since abandoned the Mahomedan faith and called himself a member of the Orthodox Russian Church. He really belonged to the church outside the churches, the Tabernacle of the Wild, and, as that is the place of worship which Cecily and I attend, religious questions were fraught with no pitfalls for us.

We spent our first day in a prospecting excursion up the wide valley of the Kuban, where we sought the meeting of its waters, as they come tumbling and rushing down from the source in the glaciers west of Elbruz, with those of the swift tributary, the Terberda,

which hurry to the tryst from the snow-fields lying west of the Klukhor Pass.

We rambled up deep ravines cutting the skirts of the great mountains, and climbed to the heights above, from whence we caught glimpses of ice-robed Elbruz, and the main chain streaking away to the south beyond the Klukhor, a line of glittering pinnacles, with the silver sheen of opalescent glaciers curving off into the mists.

The heads of all the valleys hereabouts were likely ground for tûr and chamois, and in the forests around the castle bear tracks were very numerous.

On a sandy bank two wild cats kept a faithful diary in which all their comings and goings, their squabbles and makings-up, were duly recorded.

Ali told us that the spoor was that of "barse," as the natives call the leopard, and befogged me much until I discovered that he had a habit of terming all the members of the cat tribe "barse" indiscriminately.

The leopard might be extinct in the Caucasus for all the sportsman sees of the beast, but he is there all right, and in this Kuban district, in high rocky fastnesses, above man's footsteps, we occasionally came on traces of the elusive creature. He is certainly not numerous, although more so, probably, than is generally imagined. To make even the roughest calculation of the numbers of these night-hunters, who inhabit a region abounding in chamois and small game, would be beyond the powers of even a competent naturalist-statistician. None of the Prince's retainers were naturalists, and their statistics were oral tradition.

In the forests and mountains where we hunted I never heard of or met a single native who had seen a leopard within rifle range. Keebeet, the head forester, had once lured a fine specimen, whose skin adorned a divan in the great room in the castle, to its death by placing poison in a dead chamois. How hungry must that mistaken leopard have been! For, like the Mahomedan, he is very particular how his food is killed and likes to do his own butcher work.

If our first day was blank, in so far as sport was concerned, it gave us another interest. That is the wonder of the wild. Its unexpected introductions are never the cut-and-dried affairs of civilization.

As we breasted a hill which barred our view of the snow-tipped peaks beyond, a tatterdemalion shepherd, one with the rugged landscape, met our gaze. He was tending the straying sheep, sometimes casting little reminding stones, "thus far and no farther" messages, to his flock.

The old man looked back at us serenely, gravely, with no inquisitiveness, only a simple wonder. He stood with bent shoulders as one who carried a mighty weight, his pose arresting in the simplicity of a patient endurance, an illustrative embodiment of a life of hardship and toil. The poor, weary, sunken eyes, dim now, spoke of the unrewarded years, and from their piteous depths the wraiths of long dead hopes arose, gleaming fitfully. His hands, wonderfully expressive, strong, toil-worn hands, told us more than all, and in the gnarled fingers and knotted veins were

written the history, the endurance, the suffering of a lifetime.

From a bowing acquaintance we passed to a deeper interest, thence to friendship expressed in broken Russian, and ere long the old shepherd promoted us to his inner circle, so that it was not possible to let a day go by without spending an hour at the little kosh on the hill, a skeleton framework of wood, covered in with sheepskins and beech branches.

Mazan was a pagan poet. He knew nothing of a God, and yet was not without his deity. Pantheism was his creed, Nature his religion. The fragrant earth made him an altar, the leaves whispering in the wind a choir, the toss and churn of the river sang his song of thanksgiving. The throb of the thrush on the silence of dawn was Mazan's idea of Heaven, and the pale moon looking over a balustrade of stars thrilled him to youth again. Every butterfly, fluttering on slender wings, Ariel-like, carried a tender message; a sentient soul breathed in every blade of grass.

Mazan was as the earliest poets, Nature-taught. Imaginative minds, untutored, dimly conscious of a shadowy unknown, turn to the earth-mother, and find her all-inspiring.

Our shepherd could not shape his dreams into the lure of words, or explain how his barren, toneless life was made liveable and beautiful by the rainbow mirage of his fanciful mind, but he could catch the rhythm in the sob of the storm racing apace over the river bars, and hear a sonorous minstrelsy in the crashing of mighty branches hurtling to earth before the

wind. The whole of his little compassed world evoked a harmony of spiritualization in the primitive old man o' dreams.

The Prince told us our shepherd's history.

Long, long ago, Mazan, derelict now, with no home but the shelter beside another's flock, had lived in forested Circassia, in a rich holding of his own. From thence he drifted into the forces of tribal warriors resisting the Russians, until at last he reached the distant country of Schamyl's mountaineers. Perhaps Mazan went purposely, for he was ever a fighter. Enlisting under the banner of the fanatical patriot, he fought in the great struggle for some years. Suddenly Home called. Circassia, and perhaps—who knows?—the memory of one other. Over the ranges, the glaciers, the grassy highlands, he journeyed, treading lightly, his heart singing. He who had thought but of War, now dreamed but of Home.

Nobody knew the end of Mazan's journey. He could not tell himself, for he came back with clouded brain, back over the mountains, across the frosty Klukhor Pass, falteringly, laggingly. The Prince's father took the wanderer in—Karbardans are said to be akin to the Adighé—and here, as a sheep-tender, Mazan had lived ever since, gradually picking up the frayed thread of his life, and slowly weaving, Arachne-like, the golden strands of a Might-have-been. To poor aged Mazan Circassia was Circassia still, but something, something demoniac and revengeful, a Shade, perhaps, of one of his old-time foes, prevented his return. But some day he would go home. The work, the long



MAZAN'S LITTLE WORLD

day's work, would be done ere long. Some day he would go home.

Perhaps of anyone I have ever met brain-clouded Mazan was the most imaginative. How we loved his beautiful thoughts. He told us of the Light who came in the morning to play on the leaves, of the Breath who marshalled the clouds into armies, of the Voice who spoke when the skies opened. He had a quaint fancy, too, about the bracken fern. Once in all the year, he said, the stalk breaks into a foamy blossom of sweet-scented flowers. The marvel only lasts a passing second, but if you are there at just the right moment on just the right day and quickly gather a spray, you will from that hour possess an all-comprehending and infinite knowledge. There would be nothing on earth left for you to fathom. Only, Mazan added, rather sadly, no man has yet been fortunate enough to prove for himself the truth of the tradition.

I wonder !

For, somehow or other, Winston Churchill has contrived this thing.

The beautiful weather broke, and for two days sleet and hail drove through the valley and thunderous rain fell in waterspouts.

To while away this season of our discontent the Prince tried to interest us in Russian politics. Our own are stupid enough, but the Muscovite variety seems more unenlightened still. Our host, however, did not allow the wiles and ways of politicians to trouble him much, for he had a most amusingly comprehensive method of dismissing from his thoughts

anyone who ventured to hold diametrically opposed views to his own. Such ideas could not possibly matter, for the holder was invariably stigmatized as "quite mad." By the time he had worked through the list the Prince could not tell us of one sane statesman.

It was after one of these illuminating discussions that Cecily wrote out the insinuating lines :

"All the world's a wee bit saft
Save thee and me,
And thee's a little !"

and hung them on a desk which set its *raison d'être* at naught. It was made of the entwined horns of the ollen, the giant deer of the Caucasus, and the sharp tines dug into you on every side. The most rampant author would cease authoring here.

CHAPTER XIV

OLLEN AND OTHER HUNTING

Come, shall we go and kill us venison?

As You Like It.

And it would do well to set the deer's horns upon his head, for a branch of victory.—*As You Like It.*

OLLEN does not mean a stag peculiar to the Caucasus only. The Russians call all the deer genus ollen. I think the variety to be found in the Kouban ought really to have a special designation of its own, something to indicate its peculiar grace of contour and magnificence of horn. I think the wonderful creature, like the wapiti, according to Mr. Roosevelt, "the lordliest of the deer kind in the entire world."

Beauty is always in the eye of the beholder, we know, and if we didn't we should soon glean the fact from a systematic perusal of the society fashion papers. Personally, I consider the moose far more lordly than any wapiti, and the greater koodoo more majestic than all.

I asked our Prince if he had any data relating to the deer of his country, anything to interest, anything bearing on its undoubted resemblance to its cousin of North America, and he produced a little Russian book, a sort of transmogrified *Child's Guide to Knowledge*.

“The ollen is an animal which bears antlers.” Tersely that, and nothing more. The brief wisdom vouchsafed no details of the antlers when borne, of their relative size and marvel of symmetry, the materials of which they are constructed, or anything whatever of antler architecture.

Just as the 20th of September is called in Gaelic “The Day of the Roaring,” so the 10th of that month is known among the natives of the Caucasus as “The Time of the Calling,” because it heralds the calling season in the Kouban. Naturalists propose, animals sometimes dispose. Very often the stags most provokingly postpone their warfare and love-makings until a later date, even so far on in the month as September 25th, but if the weather is fine and open the time of times in the deer world commences about the 10th and continues for a month or so, after which the creatures calm down to mundanity and eat and sleep and live peacefully once more.

The bagging of my best ollen did not require any great expenditure of finesse or effort. As luck would have it I got the topping twelve-pointer as easily as falling off a gate. Cecily worked like a navy to obtain her less splendid specimen, and, in spite of the ease with which my prized trophy came to me, we formed the opinion before very long that stalking in the Kouban is a stiffish job and the hunter deserves all and more than he gets.

In this district the deer are to be sought for in the wooded ridges, high and wind-swept, and the penetration of these forested depths has drawbacks as well as in-

sinuating charms. Persistent autumnal rains ruffle in time the surface of the sublimest philosophy. Such pattering, sweeping showers, slanting on the keen breath of the icy wind, girdling all the little wild world with mists, Ariel-wise, "in twenty minutes."

In the dense undergrowth of tangled willow skeins and silver birch scrub lie giant pines fallen by the way, reminders of winter's tempests, and with these unseen tree stumps to trip you up and tightly laced thongs grown again and overgrown to throw you down, the best of good trackers finds the conditions difficult. And yet—the ollen make nothing of the density. Through the wanton maze they pass so easily. All around us we heard their tense, vibrant notes of challenge, followed by a series of contemptuous grunts.

New spoor should mean that deer are close at hand, for the majestic ollen moves slowly in an undisturbed and little-hunted region. But—a big But! It needs an average good stalker and a trifle better to cross slippery rocks, polished to ebony by the rushing, swirling waters of all the centuries, wade through swiftly-rushing tributary streamlets, and then on through well-nigh impenetrable forests in the required persistent silence. Silence! That is the watchword, the be-all and end-all. Perseverance, dogged perseverance next, and luck preponderating. Not much finesse, no matching of your wits against those of an alert superior, no burning heart-searchings for unwonted depths of courage, no fierce darting stabs of excitement pricking up and down your spine. Silence, and an unsuspecting stag within range.

I shot my ollen when out with Keebeet, the chief forester, game-warden, what you will, a Russian worthy, one of those wonderful people who understand how to get others to do the work and yet make it seem to himself and all about him that he is the most diligent and busy person alive. From a shallow backwater he threw pebbles into the great River Doing, and in the widening ripples saw a maelstrom of his making.

Keebeet was vindictive, too—and I hate vindictiveness, especially in a sportsman. We all feel a desire to give blow for blow, anger for anger, hurt for hurt, but the man who stays his hand when he has the power to bring it down has nobility in his soul. Keebeet was a failure in all save—Keebeet! Surely the gayest, quaintest, most insouciant name in all the Muscovite category.

Near a salt spring—the natives call these places solontchaki—we crossed a marshy bit of ground, a bush Piccadilly evidently, for a criss-cross of tracks wound this way and that, and everywhere the spoor of wolves and bears intersected the passage of grub-hunting ducks. These salt licks are a great attraction to all wild creatures, to creatures of the world, also, for often in remote corners we came on primitive camping parties, taking “a course of the waters.” Caucasians tell you that the medicinal properties of their springs have been known through all the ages.

All around us the soggy earth was riddled with the spear-point drillings of snipe, and—most interesting to see—a migration of toads was in progress. From the

stream they came, little arms akimbo, slow, odd, blackish things, tadpole days behind them, faces to the big world. In wonderment they gazed on it, and marvelled. The cavalcade passed, so many of them, a dozen or so in advance, then the main body with flankers, next the rear guard, bulgy atoms, so wise-looking, and in their eyes the secrets of all mysteries.

Stepping aside to let the procession go by we suddenly came on the spoor of *ollen*, in whose squelched imprints betraying air bubbles still rose and gasped for liberty. Our hearts bounded. At least mine did—I'm not quite sure whether Keebeet had a heart or a stone. Our feet took on an airy nothingness, again, at least, mine endeavoured to. Keebeet possessed a light fantastic tread at all times, most excellent thing in a hunter. In snaky, gliding motion he passed down the tunnels of the trees, and carefully, silently as I knew how, I followed.

Down! An eye signal, involving things unutterable. We sank over our heads in an overwhelming sea of green, to rise again to surface level.

In an emerald circus before us, outlined against a background of dusky arches, gleamed a crownèd head, half hidden by the undergrowth, with full glories veiled.

One of the animals which bears antlers!

A sudden gust of tainted air gave the alarm, and the lordly stag, surrounded by a harem of three, rose slowly, very slowly to his feet, and stood an instant, target-wise, gazing in our direction, solemnly, questioningly, in leisurely, simple wonderment. So poetical a

picture would bring a pang to the heart of the most case-hardened slaughterer, and such, I fear, I most surely was.

Hunting of this variety is not sport, the only sporting element in it was the off-chance that my rifle might miss fire. 'Tis a vastly different thing to the tracking of a dangerous jungle beast, master of every protective artifice, with cunning wiles and keen resourceful machinations. In such stalks the scales are even, for the ardent tracker himself is followed. Hard on his heels spoors the Grey Sportsman, greatest of all hunters, whose quarry we all must be one day or other.

Crack! Crack! The death knell rang through the forest, reverberating in circles, breaking into spasmodic echoes. The stag, shot through the heart, tucked himself up, set off at best pace for a few yards, to roll over—dead.

With a whirr of wings a cock pheasant got up, and followed the flight of the startled does down the green corridors.

Mine the mighty deer, mine the wondrous head with its stately crown, one of the fascinating animals which bears antlers.

My hand closed round the slender tines, and my eyes ran up and down this thing of branching beauty springing from either pedicel. The soft protective casing of velvet had long left the hard dry mass. How strange to think of it as ever tender, pliable, pulsating with life, to believe that busy living cells had manufactured this exquisite coronal, and all for me!

When the Indians made their Paradise a happy

hunting-ground they knew what they were doing, and the missionizing influence of it. How I wish I had been born a Sioux or a Cree. Far rather would I wander ever on the trackless shining plains after immortal ibex or glorified gazelle than eternally sit on a damp cloud-bank in white robes which never need laundering, twanging a golden harp which is never out of tune. The thing's unequal. But—a fly in the amber! In the Indian Paradise every day leads to great issues, and there are no blanks. I shouldn't care for that. Constant success soon satiates—it is in man's blood to value only that which is difficult to acquire. Did not Ovid make that plain to us centuries ago? The apple dropped at our feet has not the sweetness of fruit gathered from the topmost bough, at risk of a broken neck. Out on us for contrary beings! But—it's true, isn't it?

It is one of Nature's most alluring "ways" to hide from us her greatest treasures, to give as the incentive to search.

"They only know what nature means
Who watch the play behind the scenes."

For she is not prodigal of her effects, like a Drury Lane spectacular drama. She lays few of her jewels at our feet, and those charms which she seems to be-spread generously conceal a thousand more.

I left Keebeet to the hideous dismemberment—being a Russian he had not desired to make my prize edible by giving it the damaging throat-slash of the Mahommedans, which simply ruins the appearance of so many trophies designed for setting-up purposes.

I wandered off along the top ridges of the valley, above the tree-tops, sometimes penetrating downwards when a tempting jungly trail allured me. Like old Hazlitt on tramp, it will be hard if I cannot start some game. My rubber-soled shoes made no sound, but they slipped sometimes, ominously, on the damp leaves and mosses. I soon came to bless the all-pervading dampness, however, for instead of having to contend with twigs and crisp leaves which go off in tiny salvoes of artillery at every step, I sank into a lush undergrowth which kept the secret of my passing.

Then—lunch. Put up for me by the minions of the "Castle." It was a weird collection of congealed lumps of boiled mutton—there's something hideously humdrum about cold boiled mutton!—and odd bits of dark brown bread clapped together which bore a far-away resemblance to sandwiches. These Gargantuan productions were plentifully besmeared with honey, honey so strongly flavoured with eucalyptus that my lunch smelt like a chemist's shop. Of course, in the wilds of Karbarda, cold mutton and eucalyptus honey is a sumptuous repast, if not altogether a feast of reason or a flow of soul.

A sharp-eyed, slender rodent came "to haunt and startle and waylay," a creature of tremors and alarms, hungry, but very wary. He was a mink of sorts, with slightly-webbed toes, pelage of chestnut brown, and a white blaze on his chin. His tail was trying to be bushy, but just missed that state, for he was not yet through his summer moult. Winter would see him in fine apparel.

I jerked my arm unduly, and in a couple of jumps the mink gained safety. That is his quick way. He is the Kitchener of all the furry world for strategy.

The mandate note of quail fluted in rhythmic insistence—Whit-tu-whit! Whit-tu-whit! and all about me the small sweet sounds of the forest people never stilled. The chirr and chirp and shrilling of cicadæ and crickets, the soft rustle of some sinuous creature making a way through the underbrush, the snort of a disturbed boar, the whistle of the woodpeckers, and the lyric rapture of many birds all voiced for me the mysterious tongue of the wilderness, the siren call of the wild.

Strange that Darwin, greatest of all observers, was so little affected by the singing of birds. He has so few things to say about the marvel, hardly anything to tell us, and we would know so much.

The roar of a near-by stag—a grand primeval sound—made me start to my feet. I could hear him so plainly, almost he might be lurching with me. I thought I should be able to locate him easily, and—there's the rub! Few creatures are so difficult to place as this ollen of the Caucasus, and when you think you know exactly where he is the creature's half across the river. The roaring is so deceptive, and so very much depends on whether the call was given in your direction or with head facing towards a strictly opposite corner of the forest. The echoes, too, are all his Familiars, and aid and abet escape.

The wind was in my favour, and I intended swooping down in approved style, for it is always quite hopeless

to stalk from below in such thick cover, even if the breeze blows right.

I squirmed my way to within perhaps two hundred yards of my noisy friend—I could hear him burnishing his antlers all the while. Slash! Slash! A thick belt of mountain ash barred my progress; I could not penetrate it. Utter silence fell. I knelt on the thick carpet of moss, scarcely breathing. A woodcock, lying close, snuggled closer, unable to rise from the enshrouding tangle because of its length of wing. I pretended not to notice the little bird, and presently it was stilled to passivity again, and only its bright eyes told me of its presence. It is very hard to distinguish the male from the female woodcock; the latter, perhaps, is a little larger and the former a trifle darker, but that is really all, for, as the birds grow older, the peculiar marking of the outer wing feather, so noticeable in the fledglings, goes altogether.

For half an hour my stag and I played this silence game, and then because I had no designs on his life, and only asked to see him, I commenced working my way round towards the end of the screen of ash, which, I could see, thinned as the glade hollowed.

As I looked about me and my eyes grew used to the glare and brightness of the sun falling aslant across the pinewood paths, I caught a glimpse of a grey wraith gliding through the green, a beautiful picture of repressed action, every nerve taut, horns laid well back. So—stealthily—he passed.

I had to retrace my steps carefully, or I should have been bushed, for I had rambled farther than I knew.

Cushioned on a soft bed of rotting leaves and decaying vegetation, I came across a late—or early, whichever way you like to take it—red-deer calf aged not more than two days, drowsing away the hours. The wide-eyed little creature made no attempt to run away from me, as it assuredly would have done were it even twelve hours older, and licked my hand as I stroked its satin coat. Though so youthful I think he understood the art of mimicry, or his mother understood it for him. Placed as he was, the colours blended so perfectly, so harmoniously with the surroundings that the fawn was safe from human detection. Any chance passer-by would take the little one for an ant heap scratched up by the pheasants, or a broken tree stump. I should never have found him but by accident.

When I essayed to leave my new friend would none of it. He untucked his long legs gravely, with the deep-set purpose of accompanying me. It was a long time ere I persuaded him to stay where he was until his dam returned from pasture.

Keebeet was asleep with the great head of my ollen impaled on a tree trunk beside him. The place looked like a shambles. This part of big-game hunting is woeful!

Presently he lifted the trophy shoulder high, a big load, and then, tiring, he set the deer's horns upon his head, like a branch of victory. This side of big-game hunting is glorious!

We notched the trees as we passed, so that anyone who cared for it might go out from the castle and bring in the rest of the meat.

Cecily and the Prince had drawn blank. They had been trying for ibex in the forest, for these creatures of the mountains often descend to the timber line, where it is very hard indeed to bag them.

After my trophy had been admired, Keebeet, true to his nature, set someone else to take off the head-skin the while he sat and looked on and tried to look as though he was doing the whole job himself. They were all ignorant of the simplest rules of taxidermy, and it ended with my doing the major part of the dissection myself. The skull I placed in an ant heap, knowing the Kouban ants! They picked it clean, as I wished them to do, then started in on the bones. In a day the great head was denuded.

That night we heard the stags roaring for hours. We sat by the window listening to them, trying to locate the sounds, but the soft liquid notes of a night-jar frustrated us. As the bird wheeled past against a light sky, it seemed to us that it was of the pennant-winged variety, for a little banner fluttered from each wing.

I wish I knew whether the pennant-winged night-jar got his ornament from sexual or from natural selection. Cecily argues that it must be the latter, just because she has read so many authorities who support that generally accepted theory. What I want to know is, why, if it is merely a natural selection, is it donned in the courting and breeding season?

A chamois and ibex drive was to be the order of our next day, and as this was the manner in which our Prince, who knew little or nothing of stalking as we



KEEBET WITH HORNS OF OLIEN

understand the word, obtained his sport, we were most anxious to see the system of the thing in practice. Keebeet told us that during one of these gais, or drives, the Prince had shot eleven ibex in a morning.

There seems little or no sense in battues of the kind, with all the best elements of hunting left out. From what we could gather they always selected well-known plateaux and passes, upon which the beaters converged, and the game was all to the man behind the rifle.

Our host claimed to be an authority on the ways of tûr, and was busily compiling a sort of census of their numbers and distribution. By unconsciously counting up the same animals over and over again he had simply thronged the country, on paper at least, with roving bands of energetic and healthy specimens, all fitted out with record heads. Gradually the census was evolving into a book on Caucasian sport generally, very statistical and uniformly dull.

"I tell you all the facts about shooting here," he said, when we complained of the uninteresting scraps we had to listen to. "Things you ought to know. All that I do, no more."

"But what a dull, unimaginative book it is going to be, so unoriginal, too," quibbled Cecily. "We have so many facty shooting books already. Aren't you going to drape the ugly facts at all?"

"I write what I see," replied the Prince stolidly.

"Then your trouble will begin when you see what you write," laughed my cousin audaciously.

And he laughed too, good-humouredly, as an Englishman would. It was not always thus, however.

“Whiles” we could chaff him to any extent, and “whiles” he was unable to bear being rallied on any subject, which was often disconcertingly annoying. Cecily said I expected too much from him, that I would have him an Horatio—Hamlet’s friend, an I could. A man who takes Fortune’s buffets and rewards with equal thanks, a man with strong feelings used for strong purposes, not squandered on anything.

And there are so few Horatios in the world !

CHAPTER XV

SPORT OF SORTS WITH THE PRINCE

A boar-spear in my hand, and (in my heart
Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will)
We'll have a swashing and a martial outside.

As You Like It.

I love the sport well.

Merry Wives of Windsor.

WE started out early with a number of wild men of the woods to act as beaters. As we got on to our ponies the Prince held the stirrup for each of us with a grave courtesy which much became him. It is an old, old custom in Karbarda, fast dying out, and in times gone by no host ever allowed his guest to mount without the graceful compliment.

Along the banks of the swirling Kouban we rode in single file, a strange and motley company, as odd as any I have ever been in. We two in dapper khaki serge suits, for we realized with the Chevalier D'Eon that it is one thing to live in skirts in times of peace and quite another in times of stress; the sombre Prince, with his Persian lambskin papak pulled low over his eyes, and the sun a-gleam on his burnished belt and epaulettes—inconspicuousness formed no part of this sportsman's programme; Ali Ghirik, withered as a mummy, encased in a brown tscherkesska; the others

in nondescript ragged garments, or sheepskin robes so roughly fashioned that, parting company, the seams let the sunshine in.

Some of the men were armed with ancient matchlocks, all with kinjals, and they talked among themselves in weird gutturals with an odd sadness in the drop of the sentences, like the sound of wild winds sweeping across the snow wastes.

We skirted great still reaches where the Prince's retainers were wont to fish for us in wholesale fashion, wading knee- and sometimes shoulder-deep, as they dragged an effective apparatus made from a longish piece of wide-meshed net, attached to a couple of poles. After a stretch of river had been patrolled, the outermost fisherman curved to the bank, and gradually the catch was adroitly landed. It always consisted of the strange-looking som, largest of the Caucasian fresh-water fish, in varying sizes, and perhaps a perch or two. The trout of the region, though they would take any sort or kind of fly, managed to evade the net most successfully.

The hideous som grows to an immense size, and has the most repellent aspect, with thick whiskers. It is, I think, certainly of the pike genus. Natives say that its average length of years is seven hundred, and they profess to be able to tell the age of each som by its teeth.

We often tackled youngsters of two hundred or so for dinner, and found them quite tender, if no great treat.

The som, by reason, I suppose, of its girth and

appearance, lends itself to the wildest "fish stories," and we were solemnly told of dread encounters in which unthinking wayfarers stooping to drink were seized as if by a crocodile, carried off bodily, never to be seen again. The *garde-chasse*, Keebeet, added to the tales by saying that som afforded excellent sport for a good shot, and wouldn't we like to try our skill.

I think they honestly believed these yarns of theirs, handed down as they have been from generation to generation. The simplicity of these wild Karbardans was their most charming feature, such trustful, childish simplicity, contrasting so oddly and alluringly with the eagle keenness of their eyes. They are simple because they are ignorant. The Juggernaut which we call Progress has not passed through their murmurous forests, the way is too long and too bleak, too menacing and remote. And where there is no progress there is at least content. Content and simplicity go hand in hand — *arcades ambo*.

All the Mahommedans hereabouts ate fish, and were ardent fishermen. I suppose there is no law against Moslems eating fish, but I have noticed that very often they don't seem particularly addicted to it. And another thing. I never saw them slash the fish's throat as the Prophet directed. We asked Ali about this, out of curiosity, and he said, pointing to the red gills, that Allah himself had prepared for that by cutting the throat all in readiness for the Faithful.

Everywhere in the woods a low-growing broad-leaved plant was rampant, the favourite food, the Prince told us, of the bison who once roamed these

forests in great herds, the bison whose numbers are thinned now to twos and threes. Before the ever-advancing zone of a civilization too oppressive for the great creatures to live beside, although not particularly noticeable to anyone else, they have left their old-time haunts and passed into the little-known western wilderness beyond the Zellentchuk and Laba valleys. There, where the footsteps of man rarely tread, the last remaining specimens, saving the protected herd in Lithuania, of the European bison living wild, exist, and nobody can tell us with any exactitude how many remain. The numbers all told certainly do not exceed three hundred, and probably aggregate many less. The shooting of them is entirely forbidden, and a special ukase from the Tsar himself is necessary before a sportsman can take the field.

So many people persistently term the bison (*Bos bonasus*) of Europe, "Aurochs." The word is a complete misnomer, for the true aurochs, or wild cattle, once to be found in vast numbers all over Europe, and from whose stock our own domestic cattle sprung, became extinct in the seventeenth century. In Cæsar's time, the Ur, or Aurochs, roamer of Europe and Western Asia, was classed among the fiercest of wild animals.

Dr. J. A. Allen, in his monograph on *The American Bison*, says that bison is an English corruption of *Wisent*, which is the proper German name of "the big, humped, shaggy-browed oxen which people came carelessly to call 'aurochs' long after the true aurochs had disappeared."

Everywhere in the low grounds outside the forest area, and all up the slopes of the hills, troops of young half-wild ponies roamed, disturbers of the peace, although Keebeet said that ibex, like deer, have no fear of noises or figures to which they are well accustomed. This is as may be.

Curious that such great uncontrolled herds do not travel far afield and lose themselves altogether. There was no fence to prevent their roaming—it would need to be a lengthy one!—no corral into which they were ever rounded up. The Prince said that with them free horses become attached to a certain locality, and do not leave it. They were all of the spidery type, although Karbarda is said to raise the best horses in the Caucasus. From the appearance of the representative specimens we saw in the region, I should say that Karbardan stock-getters are living on the reputation of a reputation.

The great environing nullahs or ravines were on too large a scale for successful beating. The drive was foredoomed to failure, as anyone with any knowledge of the lie of land could divine, and turned out the most complete farce.

On every side was a wonderful vista of the everlasting snow-fields, with frozen Niagaras descending to the valleys, and as the sun glinted on the cataracts of ice they took on a beryl-like glittering blue which seemed to dull the brightness of the sky itself, and put its glory out.

Keebeet placed me at last at the mouth of a cavernous pass, about a hundred yards across, with gaunt

rocks rising to snow-patched slopes, bare and desolate-looking. He bade me hold the place, Horatius-wise, against all comers. Not a difficult job, as the defile narrowed to the merest thread as it debouched on to the plains beyond, and the easiest thing in the world as the drive turned out.

I took a perch on an enfilading rock and waited and waited until I was weary of inaction. Nothing happened. High above me, far out of range, I spotted a couple of undisturbed chamois feeding.

There are, of course, many methods of driving, but the Prince's myrmidons had a patent of their own, which worked out something after this style.

The guns were posted in the passes without taking the wind into consideration at all, the chief factor in determining your location being a comfortable rock to sit upon. So much for the guns.

The beaters climbed high above the track they wished to drive, and then swooped down in line to move the game towards the passes. The animals dashed down the slopes, when there were any to dash, into the defiles, as being the only way out, and in the frenzied rush you shot as many as you could, or desired. Of course it all sounds possible on paper, but in reality I don't think they ever once brought the thing off successfully.

Keebeet afterwards ascribed this particular failure to the fact that the tûr of the region had been already vigorously hunted on the historical occasion when the Prince bagged eleven in one morning. I think, myself, the mobs of wild ponies feeding everywhere disturbed the game.



GAUNT ROCKS, BARE AND DESOLATE

Drives of this sort in which slaughter of numbers was the main object apparently, as opposed to seeking out the finest head and bagging it, could not interest anyone actuated by even the most meagre of sporting principles. I wanted to sample it, as I like to sample all things, but—nothing happened.

I shouldn't have stayed where I was so long had I been certain of the exact location selected by the Prince for his holding. Indiscriminate changes of stations when he had a rifle in his hand, and imagined game was afoot, were fraught with danger. In fact, going out with him was quite the most "nervy" thing we tackled in the Caucasus. He shot on the prehistoric system of "Each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost"—a very uncomfortable state of affairs for the hindmost. Ali told us that three game-wardens had fallen by the way already, so Keebeet's job was no sinecure.

Where the Prince really excelled himself in an airy disregard for consequences was snap-shooting in the woods, at 'cock, perhaps, in the late evening, as they came out into the open down the rides of the forest.

After this absurd waste of time we did some days' stalking on lines of our own, and came off with a couple of really good specimens of *Capra Pallasii* apiece, and a chamois, followed by some splendid sport in the westward marshes. Wonderful days with snipe, mostly jack, blank days when we saw dozens and hardly got a shot, other days when we bagged as many as thirty-six and a half couple between three of us, bewildering days, sandwiched in between, when,

with unchanged climatic conditions, the birds spirited themselves off in the mysterious fashion known to the genus.

Here and there we came on solitary specimens of the great snipe. His sluggish manner of rising, bereft of the tricky darts and turns with which the common snipe starts to fly, marked him out an easy victim. The great snipe is scarce in the Kouban district, but nests throughout the basal pine zone of the lower Caucasus.

The edges of shallow quagmires streaking off into drier lands, where thick coarse grasses grew, were the favourite feeding-grounds, and a little frill of probings always surrounded the large-leaved plant beloved of the bison. I suppose the moisture and shade attracted the worms. One bog in particular, where this plant grew plentifully, had always its couple of snipe. They seemed to reincarnate themselves. We ate them for supper, and there they were in the marsh again next morning, ready and waiting to give us another fly for our money.

Of course, in the uncertainty lies the witchery of snipe shooting. There's such an unusually strong element of chance and lottery in it, something so irresistibly provoking in the methods of the tiny birds urging you on to "do your damndest," as I once heard a provoked sportsman feelingly describe the position, as they flicker through all the laws and rules and statistics known. He is a wit-sharpener, that little atom, fastest of fliers. What ways and moods, and eccentricities and lures and beguilements he has, too! Whether to take him as he rises, with his intricate up

and down wing movement in full going order, or wait for the even flight which usually—alas! all rules have their exceptions, and those of the snipe world are all exception and no rule—succeeds the maze of twists—Ah, there's the rub!

The Prince laid it down in his book on *Sport in the Caucasus* that you must always walk down wind on snipe, because snipe always rise against the wind and for a hair's-breadth second seem to poise above the just-left ground. Ours never did any of this "poising." They darted away with unerring accuracy every time.

I like to go down wind on snipe myself, and should always stalk them so were it possible. How often will the lie of the land permit of this? One must take one's ground as one finds it. My experience has been that snipe invariably frequent the sort of country in which it is impossible to walk in every direction for even a quarter of a mile down wind without being brought up short. More often than not one must shoot against wind.

In the days of my youth I tried to teach myself from books how to kill snipe, and slaughtered, in fancy, countless hundreds, as my author bade me. In the days of my experience, I won't say age, I know that cut-and-dried theories go to pieces before the marvelous mechanism of a snipe's erratic flight.

Most writers call the successful shooting of the little bird "a knack." Well, there's a lot of knack about it, but it's a kind of an art with some people, and in the composition of the greatest big-game hunter the art is

often absent. Maybe he tried so hard to acquire the knack that he lost the art. And, to my mind, everything in snipe shooting depends on whether the art is left—or left out.

Our 12-bores only weighed 6 lbs each, and we found a charge of $2\frac{3}{4}$ drams of powder and $\frac{7}{8}$ ounces of No. 8 shot just right. The Prince preferred No. 10 and consequently lost a lot of birds, which, just riddled about the wings, flew away and were never seen again. He did not seem to have grasped the undoubted fact that, unless you hit a vital spot, it takes more than a mere touch to kill a snipe.

A glorious time of thrills was ours when the Prince's retainers beat the forest for us.

I hate these drives, drives are for crippled hunters, but I did not express my adverse views, or perhaps the ragged henchmen would not have thrown their hearts into the business, which they certainly understood better than they did the driving of ibex on the mountains.

I placed myself on a jungle path, wide as a turnpike-road, clear of timber and undergrowth, and waited events. Cecily was stationed in the next green tunnel, a narrower way, parallel to mine.

First came the birds, in distraught disarray, flying wide and wild. Woodcock, breaking cover at many points, in zigzag course; pheasants with plumage flashing in the sun; sleepy, blinking owls, pigeons and hawks, in fellow-feeling strangely akin; and beautiful vari-coloured starlings clustering together in a rosy cloud.

Next a solitary old boar rushed out with hackles on end, and tusches gleaming white against the green background. Just for a moment I saw him with back well humped, mobile snout carried low at the charge, eyes like long-lit lamps. Crash! Into the opposite tangle his thundering pace carried him, with the velocity of an eighteen-pounder shell, and so to safety.

A wolf now, furtive and wary. Not for him the reckless taking of chances, the wild distressed stampede. He stole forth with the quick right and left glance of his kind, the first thing his mother taught him ere she gave him freedom. He saw me, and for a second it seemed to me, standing there, with unready rifle, his grey coat grew stiff and erect—then, like a ghost he passed, stealthily as he came.

Hares, scurrying this way and that in frantic disorder, and tragic-faced little rabbits with no reason in their race, fled past, and then an old hind, with terrified eyes, leapt out almost alongside me.

“Buagh!” she cried protestingly. “Buagh!” as I stepped towards her the better to see what she was like.

A grand deer broke up wind, crashing through the underbrush tempestuously. He made an impossible mark as he dashed by, even had I wanted to try for him. Deer in close thickets are desperately difficult to see.

The forest, of course, was on too vast a scale to drive really thoroughly, but we beat portions successfully enough. I loved to hear the stir which followed on our passing. The very grasses tingled with excitement. 'Twas like the reviving interest of a scandal in some

miles-from-anywhere village at home, the same chatter and palaver, and rushing to tell each other. The wild had something to talk about for days ahead.

One day we beat solely for pig, on which day the porkers certainly had the best of it. I came through the least of the density with the beaters, and helped speed a fine boar towards Cecily, who had the Prince to load for her. As he saw them the animal baulked, and turning on his tracks dashed back to me. I threw myself into a thicket of wolf's-tooth thorn in order to avoid the charge. Don't ever do it, an you can help it; wolf's-tooth pricks dreadfully. As I raised my scratched face to peer back at the scene of action I saw the malicious eyes of the boar gazing at me from a cover not twenty-five yards off.

To charge or not to charge—that was his question. Luckily for me he answered in the negative, and was off *instantly* with a savage snort, to fall across the line of beaters, who up to now did not seem to realize that a Juggernaut was loose in our midst. The men, shouting and prodding the grass wildly with their used-for-everything flintlocks, adroitly turned the pig into a *cul de sac* of thorny jungle tangle, around which they all danced fearlessly, still brandishing the weapons of which I stood in fear and trembling. They all had a playful habit of going off in the most promiscuous fashion, and, with a lofty indifference of convention, few of the men ever thought of bringing the weapons to the shoulder, which added a sporting element of chance to the blindest day—you couldn't conjecture where the haphazard charge would lodge.

Only for a second was the gallant beast nonplussed. Breaking back once more, with ferocious impetuosity he thundered through the flimsy cordon, knocking one man over like a ninepin, and cutting another in the leg with a tossing upward rip of the sharp tushes. If a boar gets within striking distance his movements are so quick and dexterous there is very little hope of avoiding the battering onslaught.

How I admire this animal! Whenever I find myself pitted against him he seems of all the jungle folk the most magnificent. So courageous, and I love courage, so strong of heart, so nimble of foot, and with hackles up so like a lion. But braver, far, than the King of Beasts. Even in his death agony he is still fearless, and, with head drooping as the rigor overtakes him, often raises himself for a final vengeful effort.

We could not get a shot in throughout, for the beaters in their ardour invariably arranged themselves strategically right in the line of fire.

On another occasion Cecily and I, wandering with Ali in the woods, disturbed some swine feeding on roots round a shallow pool. Immediately they got our wind the whole sounder dashed through the water, tails in air, and were off down the green aisles to the shadowy beyond. I hadn't a second to get the sights on any of them ere they vanished, but Cecily was better placed. She fired at the leading boar, whose size marked him out for execution, and got him too, for we heard the thud of the bullet distinctly.

Then began a search for the wounded pig, a careful one, and as we hunted through the boundless universe,

following the path of that vanished sounder down imperial avenues of beeches and oaks, almost one would have said a hundred wounded boars had passed along, dyeing the foliage everywhere with their life's blood. All the undergrowth was aflame with a beautiful scarlet-tongued flower bursting from a velvety sheath of blackest black, a lovely thing, growing. Plucked, its juices smelt horribly, and in a moment or two the glories of its brilliant petals faded and hung limp and colourless from your fingers.

We had practically nothing to guide us, for scarcely a blood spot was visible, as is the way with wounds inflicted by any of the small-bore rifles. The early hunters who were accustomed to following up a regular river of betraying scarlet would find a difference in these sporting days. I can imagine the shade of Cornwallis Harris calling a Mannlicher "too scientific."

A furious scuffling ahead warned us to go carefully. Off again, gallant old boar, game to the last !

Next we ran him into a fairly open natural clearing, where flame-coloured rushes grew in solid clumps, and behind one of these he sulked and sulked and thought out the manner of his end.

With a weird scream of wrath all unexpectedly he charged out on us ; we scattered as he came. His wiry bristles were on-ended, and I could hear the grinding of his tushes as he shot by me. Ali, in trying to avoid the onslaught, almost fell into it, and the enraged boar passed the old man by a mere hair's-breadth.

The fast thundering charge slackened, and, turning

sharply, the agile creature sped across the open to a thick belt of cover on the left flank. We were like to lose him again, this time for ever unless one of us did something. Cecily was badly placed, but I had the chance of a crossing shot, and took it, aiming well forward, as I know from experience that one step of those powerful trotters would place the pig yards ahead whilst my finger was pressing the trigger. Phut! The bullet told heavily in the joints of his leathery harness. The fierce impetus slackened, slackened, he hardly moved—and ceased.

Ali would have nothing to do with our prize. He would help us hunt him, but there it ended. We had no means of accurate measurement, but we made him out a veteran of probably forty inches tall, with a fighting weight of some two hundred and fifty pounds. His huge tushes, all we took of him, were much worn, but average good ones.

As we left the scene the undertakers were flocking to the corpse. Lammergeyers and hawks appeared above the tree tops from nowhere, and a commandant of warlike ants, blackish, knobby-headed insects, led his regiment into action. Exquisite beetles with eyes of luminous horn marched in the rear, and the ferns rustled with the soft stir of hungry creatures. Creeping softly to reconnoitre I saw, in a fleeting second, a small lithe animal, dexterous as a snake. Like Hamlet's cloud he was something like a weasel. I am sure he was a weasel. What luck to be a weasel that glorious night!

CHAPTER XVI

MORE DAYS OF ROAMING AND SPORT

The skirts of this wild wood.

As You Like It.

Why do your dogs bark so? be there bears?

Merry Wives of Windsor.

FOR a few days we varied things by camping out in a remote corner of the forest, the better to reach the open country. We had a most palatial tent, like that of a colonel of old-time volunteers, whilst the Prince contented himself with a most unroyal residence propped up against ours. Before our doors raced the turbulent stream, and in its shallows we caught "swift trouts diversified with crimson stains" for breakfast. Most impartial trout, who rose to any fly at any time of day.

This woodland home of ours was the most beautiful of all our homes; the wind-swept camps on the mountain tops in Daghestan were more magnificent, but the still green deeps, banked with the bracken of years, the boles of the silver birch shining like bars of silver through the gloom, and the thread of the river winding, winding to the sea, caught us and held us in its tender lure as no grim snow scene could ever do. The atmosphere was so luminously clear, and the night sky afire



A WIND-SWEPT CAMP ON THE MOUNTAIN TOPS IN DAGESTAN

with stars. The familiar contour of the Great Bear, with its seven outpost stars, looked down on us serenely, and a blue brilliant we could not name challenged the brightness of Orion himself.

And yet—I cannot conscientiously recommend the Kouban forests as an ideal spot for campers-out! The rampant vegetation and miasma-laden marshes shelter many small harmful things as well as harmless, betwixt which only the eye of a magician could tell the difference. A horrible little scorpion, wasps, and fire ants all go big-game hunting, also the never-never-failing mosquito and a small but persevering leech. This aspect of shikár is *not* attractive.

At nights the mist hanging on the marshes hinted of fever, and we redoubled our precautions. We never touched water save in our tea, and of that we took sparingly. The natives themselves cannot pass a brook of any kind without stooping to drink from it.

But, sitting at the tent door watching the moon rise in silver glory above the tree tops, even the most pessimistic hunter would not dwell on the discomforts of Caucasian sport. How could he, with the musical voices of the river's edge in his ears, and every sound so wonderfully in harmony with the solemnity of the night.

From the deep blue of the sky comes the "Honck! Honck!" of geese flying in the familiar wedge-like form, perhaps as many as two hundred in the skein, and the prolonged wail of the curlew, like a Chopin prelude—the fourth, I think—livened by the cheery piping of the quails.

Now and again the short, sharp bark of a prowling fox cut the silence sharply, and often, as the night closed in, we heard the long-drawn hunting call which anyone can pick out, even the tenderfoot who has never known the wild before. Strange, what an eerie effect a wolf's howl has on most of us. I never heard it in the desolation and the silence without feeling a little pricking up and down my spine.

The men grouped round the camp fire said that these animal concerts presaged bad weather. To their untutored minds all happenings carried messages from a Helios of their own invention.

The very first night of our sojourn in the woods we were wakened by a most creepy, eldritch moaning. It held on for several minutes, low and sobbingly; a leopard, without doubt. 'Twas unmistakable.

All the air seemed tense with mysterious chances as we hurried into some clothes and seized our rifles. It is not every day in the week one gets a chance at a leopard in the Caucasus.

The Prince slept on through the excitement, and Ali—the renegade—affected complete inertia as we prodded him up in his blankets. He lay by the fire, as all the men did, like black cocoons enveloped in their bourkas and miscellaneous wrappings.

The forest giants tossed out their arms to us, beckoning, calling, and down the dim aisles the weird lowing drifted on the night air as through the shadows we crept forward, silently as we knew how.

Presently the noise ceased, and left us hunting. We searched the thickets as thoroughly as we could in the

dim light, but our leopard had crept away to other hunting-grounds. We should have been in a tight fix if he had thought to spring out on us, for the brambles and the thorn were thickly entwined. Every rustle brought up my rifle. We persevered for an hour or more, and then, disappointed, returned to bed.

Inspecting the place of the sounds next morning we were very excited to find the unmistakable spoor of a leopard; a well-marked trail ran from the shadowy unknown depth to a nullah where some water lodged. All this more than fired our ardour. Alas! a trap sent for from the castle failed to snare our beast, and, though we sat up all night over a most attractive kill, we never saw or heard our "barse" again.

Everywhere about our camp signs of bears were plentiful; the wild orchard of scarlet plums, apples, walnuts, and berries of many varieties allured them. Bruin was wise to keep within the precincts of so well-filled a larder. As we passed along the "trapinkas," or game trails, we came on their beds thick with moulted hairs, and if these were not sufficient evidence our dogs—of which we had two couple—supplied the lack. They barked and barked furiously o' nights.

One evening as the shadows drew about I was making my way back to camp after a depressingly blank afternoon, when, with that sudden spurt of generosity peculiar to Nature, a charming picture was vouchsafed to me, the rarest and most irresistible of wild silhouettes. A small black bear was diligently fishing for his supper. Not with the purposeful deliberation of his big Alaskan cousin who wades in

really big rivers, going with the current, after salmon, but with a delicate finesse all his own.

He lay extended, face down, on a rotting log lying across a narrow stream, and for the moment I couldn't think why this black sleeping beauty had sought so hard a resting-place. All I could see was the rearward of him, his quaint upturned soles, and spear-like slightly-curved claws, and it wasn't until I had adroitly worked myself round to a thicket in his front that I gathered the drift of his peculiar attitude at all. So intent was the bear on his occupation that my passing did not interest him, and once I had to creep across a perfectly open glade, in full sight of him, had he but chosen to look up.

Bruin was catching baby trout, and a bright-sided fish whom I cannot name, in dozens with his open paw! Thrusting his fore-arm deep, deep into the water he patiently held it there long enough to persuade the piscine army below that there was nothing to be afraid of. The fish gathered about the trap because the oil in the paw was an irresistible attraction, and the spear-like claws were excellent imitations of hooks. Ever and again the fisherman withdrew his paw, closed on a fistful of shining silver, which he released most carefully, and ate in ones with manifest enjoyment, beginning on each tiny fish, so small that one would have said the largest was beneath the notice of a bear, at the tail end. As he neared the head he snapped it off and spat it clear away, with a little puff which sounded quite clearly on the intense silence. After each separate banquet he meditated awhile, as though

calculating carefully the heights of bliss to which he had attained. Then, with a sideway tilt to give his arm greater length, he began to fish again.

For half an hour or more I must have watched him, so fascinated was I. Suddenly he brought up his paw with no fish in its grip and raised his head, looking furtively from side to side, seeing nothing, suspecting all. The wind had veered ever so little and the dread human scent had reached those delicate nostrils. "Trudge, pack, and begone!" counselled the wardens of the wild. With a shuffle he backed off his log and on all fours went off plantigrade-fashion into the dim forest.

Then I reconnoitred his position, and by the polish on the tree stem and odd fish heads in varying stages of decomposition I gathered that this was a favourite backwater of Bruin's. I tried again and again to catch the furry fisherman at work—at dawn next day Cecily and I waited for three hours—but he never returned. He was wary and fished elsewhere, or else the berries and the fruit and the lichens and the bark of the bounteous forest satisfied him, to say nothing of the larvæ of the white ants, whose hills we often found tossed hither and thither by the bears who seek the combs in the lower galleries, which they obtain by the force of suction method, as they gather honey from the wild bees.

Though we saw many bears in the Kouban district, we rarely saw them distinctly, and we met none in good coat. Perhaps had we really sought him out we might have found a worth-bagging specimen. There's nothing

very wonderful in "Michael Michaelovitch." He is a handsomer trophy as he roams his woods, with the undergrowth for a background, than ever he looks set up on any wall.

I don't think I've told you how Ali Ghirik stalked ollen, and it is worth hearing. His methods were his own, for he was no imitator, an inventor always. When we questioned him, since we knew he had never tracked deer before, he said that his system came to him by intuition, from his inner consciousness.

He did not uphold the generally-accepted idea that a hunter's head should be the highest part of him, and always crawled along diligently keeping nose and toes to the ground, making a very observable hummock of himself, like the rounded back of a hippo in a river. High above the oscillating ferns Ali protruded, and when we begged that he would at least cover up the flintlock he had borrowed, as we covered up our weapons, he grew most annoyed, and didn't believe us a scrap when we assured him that the glint of a rifle barrel shows for miles. He also harboured the extraordinary idea, which we heard more than once in Karbarda, that the ollen of the district is bereft of hearing in the left ear! The creatures are all born deaf! How these strange notions originate Heaven only knows.

When we laughed and scoffed at the absurdity, the old man said, with an offended ring in his voice, that we were very foolish, and it was not for us to say whether or no the deer of a country which was not ours could hear or not. Surely we had observed that

the creatures on sighting a hunter turned the right ear towards the apparition ?

Ali's idea of tracking, therefore, was to locate the deaf side of the quarry, by which time even the most unsuspecting ollen had enough sense to take itself off. When the old man sighted the deer he "pointed" as a good dog would do, stiffly.

It was really very difficult not to laugh, so uniquely quaint was the whole performance. I find, as one gets older, that a beneficent Providence provides us with the faculty of being cynically amused at the want of knowledge in others. Have you noticed it too ?

Accepting the deaf theory, we asked how it was that the deer of the Kouban district were so grievously afflicted, when those around Borjom, say, could hear quite well. Our servant just shrugged his shoulders, and replied that Allah alone knew. As there was no means of getting at the Prophet's explanation of this amazing phenomenon, I cannot let you into the secret of the all-enveloping mystery. Cecily's and my experience of hunting ollen was that all the tribe had an undue amount of the sense of hearing. They possessed ears even in the back of the head.

Cecily bagged a wild cat, a huge sandy-brown tabby, twice as big as our domestic fireside sphinx, with a short tail and the softest of soft fur. A beautiful creature. The soles of the hind feet were shell pink, and the fore almost black. Pussy was hunting in the reed beds when her slayer appeared intent on duck.
Meouw !

I thought the beast very similar to the chaus or

jungle cat, whose habitat is just such marshy ground as this trophy was shot in, but the Prince said that our pussy was nothing but the ordinary European wild-cat, oddly marked. If so, it was more like the chaus than the chaus itself, and as this animal ranges through Persia and Asia Minor I don't at all see why, by some legerdmain of the wild, our beast could not be a jungle cat, or at least the hybrid offspring of one. We never solved the mystery, as we could so easily have done by taking the skin home. One of the men annexed it from the drying-board, for the beauty of the fur, probably, and then, aided by the rest of the men, put the theft on to some mysterious mammal, four-footed, of course, who had called in the night.

We saw the spoor of many lynxes, but never got a glimpse of one. I often heard an energetic caterwauler serenading his ladye o' nights. He lived high up on an unclimbable bluff, and—wise beast—never showed himself.

Out after mallard one day about this time I shot a whimbrel. The stealthy circling glide of a harrier flying low, and the hurried "Scape! Scape!" of the snipe drew my attention to an oozy reed bed near the river. If I hadn't bagged my bird the harrier would. It was like a diminutive curlew in plumage, shape, bill, everything.

As I stooped to pick up my prize I found a brilliant fresh-water crab, just like an East African river crab. I took him by his tiny rear pincers and admired him—a beautiful thing. His oval body was furred and exquisitely shaded, his legs were flexible and opaque. I

carried him home and asphyxiated him, and then dried him off. He lost some of his glory, but retained enough to give one an idea of a Kouban crab's hey-day.

Plover gave us some grand flight shooting in the twilight hours. Have you ever tried for plover as the light is going? It's the trickiest sport. They come close to ground at a terrific pace, vastly different from their daytime drifting motion. They are almost as clever at avoiding obstacles, too, as 'cock. And as difficult to shoot as bats.

Though we constantly caught flashing glimpses of the great red deer, we did not see a sizeable beast for days, and as time went on we began to think that our specimens were likely to be the only two of their kind in our bag, when luck changed, and a fine head presented itself before my enterprising rifle. This wise.

I took Ali, and we made for a high rocky eminence, my watch-tower, whereon I spent many hours. It commanded a fine range of country, and was altogether a much easier method of scouring the forest than aimlessly wandering for hours in forsaken underbrush.

I hadn't been secreted in a thornbrake for twenty minutes before a grand ollen, carrying a good head—so fine a creature should have sported a better all the same—stalked majestically out of the thick cover at the foot of my hill and came on leisurely, following a much-used game-trail, leading to a salt lick across the river. I snuggled low, mindful of Ali's pantomimic signals. He touched his left ear, almost clapped it in expressive gesture. The deer's infirmity! Had I

remembered? Oh, yes, yes! Lest he should tell the story o'er again.

Two fearless eyes, diamond bright, distracted my attention momentarily. Close beside me they flickered, "like dewdrops caught in a spider's web." A weasel, a whity-brown mottled weasel, just thinking of donning ermine. His flat triangular head swayed from side to side as he grew bolder and bolder. I never saw such inquisitiveness! What was he like—something creepy and crawly and altogether undesirable? I had it. A serpent!

That ollen simply walked into the trap—a child could have dropped him. On he came, crackling over the beech-mast blown up the hill-side by the heavy winds, until he passed a hundred yards below me. Then, his loose stride and his head nodding in slow time with the royal swing of his limbs was arrested. I saw his muscles tighten up, and the sense of something untoward grip him with deadly fear. Poor beast! Chance is a fine thing, and he had no chance at all, unless, unless I gave him one.

Did I? Ah, I wonder!

Cecily, out with the Prince, added a fair ollen to her list of trophies, a ten-pointer. He was crossing a stream shoulder-deep, and as he gained the bank she got him. By Russian sporting law the beast was our host's, who drew last, and, as my cousin confided, most unnecessary, blood, seeing that the deer was already badly hit. His Highness waived his claim, however, saying generously that he had many skins and heads of ollen, and we had not!

A heavy snowstorm drove us to the Castle again. It came quite unexpectedly, and covered the forest in a thick white pall. Unfortunately this did not last, or it would have been of great assistance in our stalks abroad.

The first thing I did on getting back was to visit the tumble-down outbuilding called a stable in order to satisfy myself that our few trophies, particularly the head-skin of my ollen, had been looked to in our absence. In doing so, I unearthed the prettiest fancy. My treasure, securely pinned to a board, was surrounded with small saucers brimful of oil, six or eight of them. I could not understand their meaning, or guess what new system of local taxidermy was this. Then Keebeet came, and Cecily, and we unravelled the mystery.

The Castle had a titular domestic spirit, as have all properly conducted houses in the Caucasus, a tiny little thing, called the "domovoi." His proper place is behind the big kitchen stove, but at night he roams about singing for his supper. It is his business to make the round of the stables at midnight in order to satisfy himself that the cattle are safe, and there he expects to find sundry cups of oil, any kind, the "domovoi" is not particular as to brand.

Certain dates in the year, as, for instance, the Feast of the Epiphany, January 18th, and odd days in October, have a disastrous effect on the spirit's temper, and though the family prepare for the nerve-storms by boiling millet, which the soul of the "domovoi" loveth, and providing the most potent variety of

vodka, that made from potatoes, nothing stems the torrent of carefully-thought-out malignancy. Sometimes, too, at these seasons, a strange "domovoi" blows in, and then the two vexed spirits, acting in concert, need some pacifying.

Only once in a great while can you see a "domovoi," a very small immortal, a sort of miniature Father Christmas, with long white beard, long hair, and brilliant eyes.

As the *dies iræ* of the household spirit was at hand the castle baboushka feared for the safety of our trophies. What if the "domovoi" took exception to them! So the saucers were placed about, a charm no gourmand "domovoi" could resist.

I believe he came to the Caucasus with the moujik—there's something very like him in Russian folk-lore. Only the Karbardans would none of it. Other brands of "domovoi" there may be, but their own has frequented Karbarda since Karbarda was.

Even His Highness was singularly uninterested in the folk-tales and proverbial sayings which must have been familiar to him all his life. I did wish he would have added to our meagre store, for in the folk-tales and the proverbs of a country we often find the key to the locked heart of things. A land so romantic, so wild, so untutored as the Caucasus must have a vast storehouse of mysterious tales and wise sayings hidden away. But the treasure lies very deep.

The country as a whole has no ancient literature, always excepting the Georgian nation, whom one cannot class with the other tribes at all; and where there

is no ancient literature the old-time legends, axioms, and proverbs, which surpass the meteoric word-comets of to-day as a star outshines a candle, lose their beauty and sparkle, their dry wise wit, and descend to mere colloquialism, often meaningless.

I did discover one gem, and I got it from a mountain Jew in Daghestan, so that it is probably of purely Jewish extraction, although the similarity of proverbs does not necessarily imply that they are not of native origin. Learned philologists have taught us that the characteristic folk-tales and characteristic sayings of all peoples have considerable affinity, and in the expression of their catapultic words of wisdom the Chaldeans have shown themselves to have much in common with the Hittites, and we know from comparison that the North American Indian shares many of his proverbs with the Manx. Indeed the "domovoi" himself has his counterpart on the Isle of Man in the "dooiney-oie," a friendly supernatural who attaches himself to individual households.

But how I am digressing!

Here is the Jewish-Caucasian proverb: "God cannot be everywhere, therefore he made mothers." Mr. Barrie himself might have invented it!

Of purely indigenous proverbs—the Russian aphorisms are fast overlaying the strata of native simplicity—we only heard three or four. One pleased me very much. "To the eagle the air, to the lizard the sand." The old shepherd Mazan used it one day when philosophizing on his own disabilities. And, questioned on our behalf by Keebeet, one of the Castle myr-

midons yielded up two or three more Karbardan gems.

“Do not fear war and trouble, for that is the season when the harvest of hypocrites is gathered in.”

“He who is fond of eating guano should always carry a long spoon with him.”

What a worldly-wise proverb for the back of beyond ! Is it clear, even to wild Karbarda, that the guano-eater is catered for everywhere ?

“Hawks are safe from hawks,” is, of course, an indifferent version of our own “Hawks winna pick out hawks een.”

“Owls fly late ”—but that’s a purely Tatar proverb.

Sometimes o’ nights around the camp-fire the wild henchmen would chant in unison as they warmed their hands by the blazing logs, and we would bid Keebeet listen and take notes. The dreary lay was always something melancholy, in keeping with the wailing voices. Someone had died miserably ; a storm had devastated Karbarda and nobody was left alive ; the crops had failed ; a snow-slide had engulfed the village, entombing all ; the wolves were out, tearing, despoiling ; famine and misery stalked the land.

Oh, dear me ! what distressing types of national songs, reflecting nothing but tragedy, the tragedy of truth, no doubt. Better the counterfeit efforts at hilarity peculiar to the Russian peasants in the wine-shops, whose songs are always of superabundant vodka and unworthy wives.

But—the cricket is not the nightingale. Why tell him so ?

The old Greek legends are known, dimly, to many of the Caucasian tribes, and are told through the centuries to the wild-eyed little ones. Only the spirit of happiness, the gladness and the sense of Spring has gone; instead there reigns the sombre melancholy of the cradling peaks.

If a Caucasian does smile the effort is so wintry, so foreign to the smiler's type of beauty, that you, watching, wish he wouldn't do it. I only once heard Ali laugh during all his sojourn with us, and that was outside a *duchan* in Georgia, a little place built beside a sort of Bethesda pool waiting for a visit from an inspiring angel. Cecily had primed herself up with salutations, and bowing to our host as he stood on the verandah, said "Kvertski!" graciously.

Instantly he vanished, to return with a basketful of eggs, brown eggs, white eggs.

"Kvertski!" said Cecily again.

More eggs. This time a perfect glut of them.

"Perhaps I had better not say it again," my cousin remarked ruefully. "I suppose it is my pronunciation."

But "kvertski" is "egg" in Georgian, and then we heard Ali laugh. Not a real let-you-have-it sort of laugh. A dry cackle like an angry turkey arguing.

None of the Karbardans shone if you required them to walk far. Though they cover the ground with a grace and elasticity of gait which as a rule goes with untiring pedestrianism, they dislike walking and rarely practise it.

Kindly good-tempered beings, with no suspicions

of us, nothing but a great and overwhelming curiosity. We never went to our room in the castle without discovering two or three Peeping Toms rummaging in our kit.

They pilfered like magpies, always bright things, and invariably, I believe, in the hope of securing a compass in disguise.

More attractive than our rifles or saddles or anything that was ours were the compasses Cecily and I carried. That complete strangers to Karbarda should be able by the legerdemain of these tiny things, aided by a Familiar in the shape of an inefficient map, to figure out more or less, very often less, where such and such a tûr corrie lay was magician's work. The domovoi himself could do no better. And when Ali wanted to increase his prestige to heights undreamed-of, he borrowed a compass and showed it off in the court-yard until both compasses disappeared, conjured somehow into the longing maw of an ample tscherkesska.

CHAPTER XVII

FLIGHT FROM THE PRINCE'S CASTLE

'Tis time, I think, to trudge, pack, and be gone.

Comedy of Errors.

Alas ! poor shepherd !

As You Like It.

Frosts, and fasts, hard lodging, and thin weeds.

Love's Labour's Lost.

“TIME travels in divers paces with divers persons.” It is an immortal truth. But surely the Immortal Speaker made a little mistake in his description of the man with whom Time oversteps the speed limit ? Who finds Time gallop the fastest ? Why, the sportsman, of course, shooting against the season and the weather and the Game Laws ; for, though he go as scientifically as rifle can shoot, he thinks himself too soon at the end.

Our trip was nearing its close. Winter waited on the whims of vacillating autumn, and in every touch of her keen breath bade us turn our backs on the wild ere it was too late, and return to a world of newspapers and letters, interminable books on Napoleon, and all the hundred and one things that go to make the mysterious whole which, for want of another name, or from habit, custom, politeness, what you will, we call Civilization.

As time travelled sport grew worse, and this because the Prince's foresters only knew the country within a

certain radius, outside of which they were useless as guides, and to venture alone involved great difficulties. The awkwardness of negotiating the often impassable unknown was too much for us, and left no time for tracking.

One fine day, when out with Keebeet and a couple of beaters, we insisted on shooting a wood which was not ours at all! We had pursued various creatures all the morning with no sort of success, and at last told the *garde-chasse* to take us to the next covert, never dreaming that there could be a limit to this vastness. There was, and we had, in our energy, reached it! Keebeet started excusing himself, but Cecily would not listen, thinking he was trying to get out of it, being tired or bored or something, and shortly told him to do as she bade him.

After a most successful afternoon, in which we bagged a beautiful chamois, one of a little band asleep in the shade, and a mighty boar, whose tushes were the best we had until then obtained, Keebeet told us we had no business really to be where we were at all, and that we were trespassing on the hunting-grounds of a certain Russian Grand Duke with whom our host was at daggers drawn!

Ali Ghirik, in his simplicity, could not understand why we, who loved hunting so much, ever left off. Why go home at all, he asked, mystified and bewildered. Why not interminably pursue something? In the Caucasus game was afoot all the year round, and would be for years and years. He was a poor student of human nature, to say nothing of the Game Laws, and could



WINTER WAITED ON THE WHIMS OF VACILLATING AUTUMN

not realize that if we eternally hunted, and shot and shot without any cessation, half the sweetness and half the longing would be gone.

Can one smell a rose for ever and it still keep its scent? If a rose is smelt all day long, I'm sure it gets bored and longs to offer its fragrance to someone who is a little disdainful.

My rose is a "gloire," and I know how to take care of it.

Also—our host had fallen in love, or whatever is its Caucasian equivalent, with Cecily, and there was no knowing how it would affect him.

My cousin only laughed when I suggested departure, and said she did think me absurd, and had I noticed anything in the Prince's manners, or lack of them, which would in any way betoken the pleasing courtesies and fantastic make-believes which constitute the stock-in-trade temporarily provided by Nature for every lover? As though it mattered whether I had or not! My own idea of the thing is that it is only behind the footlights that a man makes love really gracefully. On the stage of life the true lover, the world forgetting, is unstudied and awkward as a cassowary. And that is very awkward indeed.

"Your favourite poet," said my cousin, "tells us:

"To fly the boar before the boar pursues
Were to incense the boar to follow us,
And make pursuit where he did mean no chase."

Every time I mooted getting back to distant Tiflis there was an ominous silence, but it was not the silence of consent. Requests for horses and a cart to take our

trophies and kit to the railway line met with no response. At last, aided by Ali Ghirik, who acted as interpreter, since the Prince was better at Russian than anything, I fixed the next day as our time limit, and informed our host, who was very distraught and jumpy, the result of smoking a fat cigar of the purest El Cabbagio variety before breakfast, of our intentions.

"You may go," he said, with brutal frankness. "You may go, but she must stay. I keep her here," he went on calmly, "until she promises to marry me."

"How to goodness can she do that," I answered crossly, "when she is married already?"

"She says so, I know, but what matter? And where is he? Where is her husband?"

"We purposely left him behind," I replied loftily.

"I do not understand," he said, very uneasily. "In my country a husband does not allow his wife to travel alone."

"That is because you haven't got a *Daily Mail* to arrange things for you. All the blame of this affair is attributable to the Editor of *The Daily Mail*. He said it was highly advisable for husbands and wives to take their holidays apart, and Cecily wanted to try if he was right, and of course he wasn't! And there it is."

There it just was! For our Prince had let love run away with his wits like an Antony or a Romeo, instead of trying to keep a Henry V in his heart. It was his misfortune that Fate had conspired to make all things too easy for him. I do not think I like the man who has no cross to bear—nor the woman either.

They are all right and charming and smiling and gracious and delightful until the shoe pinches. Ah, there's the rub again.

One could not trust him either—he was too aloof to trust. A hateful barrier! That is the worst of growing old, one becomes so suspicious. In the days of my youth I lamented the inexperience which made me distrust myself, and in the days of my age I'm bewailing the experience which causes me to distrust other people.

Cecily was very diverted when I told her of the Prince's intention to keep her.

“Think of the headlines in the halfpenny papers!

AMAZING SITUATION

KARBARDAN PRINCE'S INFATUATION

ENGLISH LADY IMMURED IN CAUCASIAN CASTLE

The readers won't be able to see the castle, so it will sound all right. They won't know that the feudal stronghold is just a collection of stone hives strung together anyhow.”

“It is no laughing matter,” I said. “We are in a real quandary. He does not mean to speed the parting guests, and will not provide pack-horses or telegas. There is nothing for it but to speed ourselves. We had better ride off early to-morrow morning before the house is astir. We could manage for a short time without any kit.”-

“You forget my dressing-case,” put in Cecily concernedly. “I cannot carry that, you know. But, perhaps”—thoughtfully—“he would return it

later. A Prince could not possibly wish to retain another person's dressing-case, even if it is gold-fitted. What do you think ? ”

And so it was arranged. That evening we were to be specially nice to our compulsory host, acquiesce in our gilded capture, and at dawn, long ere his sluggard Highness thought of waking, Ali would have our horses ready for us.

As the result of the interview in which he played interpreter our henchman was all for setting off at once, so afraid was he that the delights of Tiflis would never be his again. All Karbardans were untrustworthy, he said. Did they not fail Schamyl ? “ Tscherkesses, every one of them ! ”

It was comical. But to have made a bid for safety then would have ruined all our chances of escape. Ali Ghirik, I knew, was more than inclined to leave us to our fate, and secure his own freedom, which was in no way jeopardized. As I pointed out, nobody was in love with *him*.

When one does not stop to think one is prone to act for oneself only. That is the old law, old as Time—each man for himself. He harks back.

By waiting until the early morning we could get away more or less comfortably, for it was our custom to set out at a very ungodly hour from a Karbardan point of view. And after a while our servant was convinced.

Any duffer can grasp an opportunity, but it takes a wise man to know when to let it slip.

We could not leave without saying “ Farewell ” to our friend Mazan, poor manacled Mazan, and it did not

take us much out of our way to ride round by the kosh, although Ali protested vigorously at the delay.

The morning sun blazed on the distant towering peaks, turning to cloth of gold the fringed snow patches, filtering down in slanting shafts to the far dim valleys, searching out the rifts in the serried ranks of trees.

Mazan was not with his flock, nor in his little shelter. For the first time since we came to make a custom of calling the bent old figure was absent, and the sheep roamed as they listed.

We were silent as we crossed a divide bordering the rock-strewn hill-side. Mazan not with his flock! Then we could not say "Good-bye." Mazan not with his flock! And yet—he was!

In a deep crevice into which the unwary might fall, but surely not our even-footed shepherd, lay a tatterdemalion figure, his face to the sun. His hand still clasped a few picked stones, and all the stones were white.

But—was it Mazan, so transfigured! On his furrowed countenance was graven that shadowy aloofness, that marvellous distant peace, by which the meanest man is glorified to majesty. Azrael had come for the toiler like a breath of the morning. Mazan had gone home.

Down in the beech wood, breaking the silence, a thrush, silver-throated, sang his song to the sun. Into it he wove a gentle requiem, with little trills of joy and thankfulness. Up and up the alluring notes soared to the sky, vibrant, melodious, triumphant.

“Mazan! Mazan! Mazan! Mazan has gone home!”

The general scheme of escape was to make our way to the railway via the stanitza where we had obtained fresh horses coming, and things went very well then up to midday. We were covering the distance gaily, and seemed to be on the right road.

All the food Ali had been able to snatch and bring with him was a hunk of barley bread, hard as iron. We fortunately had in our pockets a few soup squares prepared by the never-failing Elizabeth of Trinity Street.

Almost as though he knew our straits, a cock pheasant sprinted ahead, allowing me ample time to get my gun, load, and fire, when the amiable bird gave up his life without a murmur.

We hitched him, with tail trailing dolorously, to Ali's saddle for future requirements. Time was too valuable just then to feather pheasants.

At tea-time we stopped by a stream to water the horses, and make a little fire on which to heat soup in an enamel drinking cup. We filled it in the river, set it amid glowing embers, popped in the soup square—*et voilà!*

I hate to spoil the rural simplicity of the whole, but—Ali would not share the meal with us because he had to drink from the same cup! His religious scruples forbade, he said, majestically. We had nurtured scruples, too, sanitary ones, not religious, but set them aside courageously, silencing their clamour.

As the afternoon wore on, and the shadows grew—night fell early now—and we never got clear of the forest or passed the huts of the woodland Theosophists, it was borne in on us that we were very decidedly bushed. The ponies, grass-fed animals, were weary, and hardly moved. They carried biggish loads. Cecily and I had a rifle apiece on board, our shot guns, revolvers, sleeping-bags and bourkas!

A night in the open faced us, so we hobbled the horses to graze, and set to work accumulating wood for an all-night fire. We toasted our pheasant for supper, and sometimes he fell into the ashes. Once he became so very disreputable we had to dip him in the river and commence roasting operations afresh.

We slept very badly, though the night was calm and serenely beautiful. To begin with, it was bitterly cold, and the wild is so wild at night.

Some little earth creature diligently ticked away beneath my head, love signalling, I expect. I tried to locate him, but he was too deep for me in more senses than one. Then as I closed my eyes at last:

“Too-whoop!”

A ghostly winged presence, with lamp-like eyes, swept low to earth, almost touching Cecily as she lay in the dark shadows.

“Too-whoop!” with a forlorn drop on the last note.

Ali called the eagle owl “leopard of the night,” a very beautiful simile, as were many of his similes; apt, too, for of all the night fliers the habits of the keen, silent, watchful, feathered Nemesis of the wilderness closely

resemble in stealthiness the most typical cat of all the Felidæ. Even the warning note of the predatory bird has something in common with the peculiar lowing of a hunting leopard, perhaps because both voice the same pitiless intent, the same dread meaning, "We are out for blood! We are out for blood!"

Just as the dawn darkened ere it broke for day a terrific crashing in the undergrowth roused us all, and Ali Ghirik, whose bosky couch was right in the direct way of the intruder, challenged the disturber of our slumbers. No reply. An abrêk, of course, two perhaps, or more.

"These are the villains
That all the travellers do fear so much."

We disentangled ourselves from our "beds," feeling very important and heroic. Excitement lapsed into amusement as a long-eared mule, lost asset of some charcoal-burner, strolled nonchalantly through our midst. Clearly, peace in these woods was not to be had.

We courted Morpheus again—a most indifferent lover. Ali Ghirik drowsed by the fire, ostensibly on guard, and between him and me a strangely luminous beetle shed a green light through the shadows. Even at a hundred paces he glowed brightly. I know, because I got up and experimented. He was vase-shaped, with unusually long antennæ. I immured him in a matchbox, where he shone dully till morning did appear. Then we liberated him, and he celebrated his escape by an acrobatic feat, rare, I should fancy, in his portly genus. Emerging from his prison-house upside down, he did a double somersault into the air

which landed him on to his legs like a mechanical toy. After this it was nothing to reward so well-graced a player with half a leg of a pheasant. The gift overwhelmed him with its magnificence, and we left him facing the mountain of flesh before him with dismay in his horny eyes.

Onwards again, after a breakfast of more soup and more pheasant, across a tree-surrounded open space, where the bears had been gorging on chestnuts. We knew it was Bruin's banqueting-hall, because when he feeds on nuts he throws aside the husks daintily. The wild boar, dining, swallows husks and nuts together.

The forest hemmed us in on all sides still, and as I led the way down a slippery moss-grown aisle, I was nearly thrown by my horse unexpectedly shying wildly at a tall figure leaning, like a shade of Jaques, against a tree.

The Prince !

I took the meeting with assumed calmness, acting as though we quite expected to see him, and how pleasant it was and weren't we lucky. Only Cecily would not speak. Her face was angrier than I've ever seen it. As for Ali, he was frankly terrified, and sidled his pony alongside Cecily's as he began a tragical tirade in her ear.

And now the best attributes of our savage prince appeared, and he seemed a prince indeed. That he had been so wanting in hospitality as to drive us forth into the unknown without an escort was his shame as a host, but sending his ladye into the damp and dew

of the autumn night was his shame as a man. By every word and look and act he craved forgiveness. First, he brought the sacred dressing-case and laid it tenderly on the ground at her horse's feet. She would not notice it. Next he bade her look through the pine stems at our trophies securely packed into rough telegas. She paid no heed. And he would know if her coat was damp, was she tired, was she hungry, had she been afraid. It didn't matter, of course, that I was soaking through, and very weary, and unmistakably starving!

From the mysterious depths of his tscherkesska the Prince drew out a little morocco case—how often I had seen it before—and offered it at the shrine of the saddle-bow.

Cecily took it quickly, pressed a spring, not maliciously, I know, but for very gladness of possession, and the two looked down at the picture of Someone, a very stalwart Someone, with broad shoulders and gaily-smiling eyes.

"You left it behind you," said the poor Prince forlornly. And when she did not reply, "I brought it to you," he added.

The dark eagle face was illumined by that which eliminates all meanness, all jealousy, all pride.

Very gently, very softly, Cecily answered :

"Thank you, Prince. I understand."

I could see how much he liked her acknowledgment of his tenderness, for it was the best thing he had to give.

Tenderness is so innocent, it cannot be assumed

naturally. The unreal is so easily seen through. Tenderness is so beautiful. A man may give kisses in the heat of the moment, raining them on eyes and head and hair, and they may be but the passion of that moment, taking as much as they give, asking and receiving a returning satisfaction. They have a mixture of the carnal—Yes, no man can delude himself that they have not. A man may make costly gifts—Ah, that is commonplace! It is a matter of credit, and is tacitly recorded in his mind as a credit to himself, for which love is expected in return. Vain expectation! A woman will do much for presents, but she cannot bestow love at will, for it is not legal tender, and goes not even by favour. It is spontaneous. Then, cannot a man take long journeys—well, perhaps they are not in such category. He may write her clever letters to please himself, to plume himself, to say, “ See how knowledgeable I am ! ”

But it is not so with tenderness, which asks for nothing in return, and goes out straight from the heart. It is perhaps the most unselfish thing in all the world.

The Starshina's wife entertained us as we passed through the Russian settlement—her lord and master lay atop of the *pechka* sleeping off the effects of a “ *prasnik*.” His feet hung over the end—such vast feet! And his sonorous snores shook the domicile.

He was often asleep, said the good wife, always after a *prasnik*. Had we *prasniks* in England, and if so how many? And did the English husbands snore like this? In Russia *prasniks* come often. It is nice

to have prasniks, and husbands, particularly husbands, she added, as though trying to convince herself. I wanted Cecily to ask her whether or no the story of the fox who lost his tail had penetrated to Russia, but my cousin wouldn't intertranslate.

Going back to the railway line, we were provided with another collection of Cossacks, who required continuous applause and congratulations. We were by that time almost speechless from the effects of the night in the open, travel of the hardest variety, and indifferent meals, and presently sank into a condition of apathy from which it would have taken more than capering Cossacks to rouse us. All we thought of was that the end must come soon, for everything has an end.

I remember passing a Mahommedan cemetery, built on the open steppe, a mere jumble of erect stones—the Christian tombs are always laid flat—in a round ring, a sort of miniature Stonehenge, the picture of desolation. Then—the Cossack circus faded, everything was hazy, a dust cloud had settled on our brains.

We found ourselves just before midnight in a bleak and cheerless station, where we sat, emigrant-fashion, surrounded by our kit until the day broke and the train from Rostov passed through.

We shall never forget, we don't want to, the charming *bienséance* of the "Good-bye," or our Prince either, THE Prince of all the myriad princes of the Caucasus.

.

The Magic Carpet of *The Arabian Nights* shall take us back to Tiflis, high over Mount Käf, brooding by

Pjatigorsk, to whose foot the Genii ever banished all offenders. It would bore you if we set out over the same route again. There are so few adventures in these civilized days on the Georgian Road. Where Bradshaw steps in, the spirit of adventure flies away.

Arrived back in the luxury of our Tiflis hotel, we found Kenneth busy altering his work on ethnology, in which he had placed the Georgians as a little lower than the angels. *Nous avons changé tout cela!* She—the Georgian houri—had refused him! What did we think of it? Was she not guilty of an astounding piece of bad taste? Did we not consider he had every right to feel justly annoyed? Was he not correct in supposing himself to be a greater catch than one of these “foreign” princes?

A most excellent frame of mind for a lorn lover to have fallen into. He had worked up his grief into a grievance, and lo, it was gone!

I didn't trouble to let him into a feminine secret, but I'll whisper it to you if you'll come nearer. A woman very often pretends to be indifferent to a man whom she really loves, just as a man more often than not pretends to love a woman for whom he only entertains complete indifference.

I am sure Kenneth cherished the delusion that, if he had been able to see as much of his inamorata as English conventions permit he would have brought the thing off, since propinquity is supposed to be everything in love affairs. He forgot that only deep love and transitory gains anything from propinquity.

Two English sportsmen, raked in from a neighbour-

ing hotel, came to dinner with us, and we all made very merry, and bucked about our trophies no end. It was Douglas Jerrold, wasn't it, who said that if an earthquake were to engulf England to-morrow, the English would manage to meet and dine somewhere among the ruins just to celebrate the event ?

Kenneth's dinner-party reminded me of it.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCLUSION

The sundry contemplation of my travel.

As You Like It.

Twenty adieus my frozen Muscovites.

Love's Labour's Lost.

BEFORE leaving Tiflis for home we indulged in a perfect orgy of dissipation, for "the Season" had begun, and nightly dances attracted us as a honey-pot does flies. Such gay scenes, with a glittering allurements all their own. Gorgeously-uniformed warriors converted themselves into myriads by the aid of reflecting mirrors placed everywhere about the great rooms—there seemed no end to the gallants. The ladies were all in up-to-date ball-dresses, the beautiful national dress of the Georgians was ousted by Parisian and Viennese models.

The etiquette of Tiflisian ballrooms is much the same as our own, save that it does not permit a man to dance more than once of an evening with the same lady, however much he may long to do so. Kenneth asked me whether he ought to sustain the custom of the country and spoil his pleasure, or throw convention to the winds and enjoy himself. I was all for upholding custom, but Cecily reminded me that customs curtsy

everywhere to great kings, and much latitude is allowed to foreigners. This because she wanted to transgress all the rules herself.

Another quaint unwritten statute of the dance enjoined that if for some reason of her own a lady desired to cease waltzing, it was a signal for her partner to abandon her incontinently without troubling to see her to a seat or convoy her through the worst of the whirling crush; really quite reminiscent of the conventions which govern the opening of the refreshment room at our own suburban subscription balls, where, of course, it is usual, if not *de rigueur*, for the masculine revellers to make a wild stampede for the food, regardless of the existence or hunger of the feminine revellers.

About midnight the floor was always cleared for the dancing of the national "Lezghynka," which was familiar to most of the company. I expected something of "Merry Widow" variety, but it was a much more graceful business than that. The lady's part of the affair was a comprehensive series of glides and twists and turns and little tripping runs and artful cajoleries and sideway invitations to a *pas de deux*, and all the time the agile, elusive, flickering figure, light as thistledown, shyly hid her face in an all-inadequate trellis-work of her crossed fingers. Her partner, always pursuing, did a most energetic and clever fandango on his heels. In fact his entire performance was on his heels. "Click! Click!" steadily. The impetus from the toe seemed to throw the brunt of the work heelwards. It was a really pretty dance, and all the people standing about marked time,

which was very rapid, by clapping their hands to the music. Of this last I will say discreetly little! In this land of the balalaika there was too little balalaika, and too much of the earliest known "science of harmonical sounds."

Wherever you go, theatres, dances, concerts, you meet Armenians. They are concentrating on Tiflis—will they absorb it? They have their own newspapers, and pull the strings of more than one Russian "organ." I never *saw* such a place for newspapers, it rivals London. And all, from what I could gather from expurgated translations, run on the generous lines of our English Sunday eye-openers, who always have more murders and suicides on hand than can be credibly accounted for during the week—even if accounts were demanded. Sufficient for the Sunday is the "news" thereof.

When we were asked, as usually happened two or three times of an evening, what we most admired in Tiflis, we always said very diplomatically, "The Georgian ladies," because if a woman of any other nationality didn't say that, everyone would refer to those grapes which never ripen. Requested to mention what struck us as the city's greatest requirement, we invariably prescribed a destructor. If the place possesses one it must be perennially out of order, or why such hopeless heaps of rotting rubbish lying in the waste places of the town?

There are hardly any Britishers in Tiflis; I met none who permanently reside there. We were told of one who had set up a shop of sorts near the Maidan,

and we hurried to patronize him. When we got there we found a Swiss who had once been a waiter in a Soho restaurant! He told us that, though not quite English, he hoped we would find him English enough, and set about proving it by serving us with underdone beef-steak and Guinness's stout.

England is not represented in the Consular body, the office having been done away with in 1881, "because the objects for which it was founded were not accomplished." Delightfully vague, and means, I suppose, that nobody turned up for a Consul to minister to.

You are waiting to hear whether I advise you to "do" the Frosty Caucasus in your autumn holiday. It's a glorious country—I don't think there's another quite like it anywhere.

Some author-philosopher has said that the only discomforts a nomad in the Caucasus has to face these days are food and fleas. I call that a very idealistic way of looking at it. It is in its wildest corners an exceedingly tough country, grimly uncomfortable, cruelly rough-and-tumble. I agree with the philosopher that there is now "practically no danger in travelling in any part," but I think he ought to have underlined the "practically."

Discretion is the better part of valour in all parts of the world, and particularly so in Caucasian wilds. Oddly enough, nobody is a better judge of his man than the savage mountain-born one, the type who has never seen beyond his ice-wall to lose his judgment. If you look the sort of person likely to protect yourself,

and carry nothing valuable save your weapons—powerful commanders of respect—you may go to the back of beyond in all confidence. Anyone who travels round with the “God help me” air of the average Cook’s tourist is bound to be held up sooner or later.

Such people are held up daily even in police-patrolled Soho.

And so—go to the Caucasus, but don’t go if you cannot return when it calls. They’ll haunt you, those lone silences, and urge and plead, and beckon.

And now they’re all a-crying, and it’s no use me denying :
The spell of them is on me, and I’m helpless as a child :
My heart is aching, aching, but I hear them sleeping, waking ;
It’s the lure of Little Voices, it’s the mandate of the Wild.*

* From R. W. Service’s “Songs of a Sourdough.” By permission.

THE END.

TWO DIANAS IN SOMALILAND
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SOME PRESS OPINIONS.

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TWO DIANAS IN SOMALILAND.

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