

A Journey  
in  
Soviet Transcaucasia

BY

DAVID RODEN BUXTON

*Reprinted from*

BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE, DECEMBER 1933

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## I. WALKING OVER THE CAUCASUS.

IN two nights and three days the express train from Moscow covered the thirteen hundred miles or so to Vladikavkaz, 'Mistress of the Caucasus.' Everyone speaks still of Vladikavkaz, although officially the town has changed its name to Ordjonikidze, in honour of one of Transcaucasia's revolutionary heroes.

I had come with the intention of following by some means the famous 'Georgian military road' across the Caucasus Mountains from Vladikavkaz to Tiflis, and the best way, I thought, would be to follow it on foot. My project, however, received little encouragement. In Moscow I had been assured by one who should have known that the road was already closed for the winter.

Others told me there would be rain and snow and avalanches. Still others, that to walk alone anywhere in the Caucasus was a hazard to be undertaken only at the risk of robbery, if not murder, by the bandits who frequent the mountains. One kindly individual at Vladikavkaz could not grasp the attraction of a long-drawn-out walk when a motor-bus could take one over in a single day.

"What do you want to see up there?" he inquired. "Grass? Stones? There is nothing else."

Nor did the face of nature reassure me. On my second day in Vladikavkaz I had not yet so much as seen the Caucasus. Over the town there lay a low and shapeless mass of cloud shedding a depressing drizzle; it was cold and dreary. However, I hoped perhaps the mountains might rise majestically through the clouds into the sunshine above. I despatched two small pieces of baggage to Tiflis by lorry, filled my sack with Torgsin groceries<sup>1</sup> to last a week or more, and on 13th October 1932 set off along the broad straight road which runs directly southwards towards Tiflis.

The mountains were still invisible, and I walked blindly into the mist. For some time the road, rising imperceptibly, gave no foretaste of the great barriers it surmounts on the difficult route through the mountains. Later the mist broke up, and for the first time there appeared on either side of the narrowing Terek valley the low ranges which form the northern foothills of the Caucasus. Passing an old

*Please return to —*

Old Ellwoods  
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Cambridge CB3 9NY  
Tel. Cambridge (0223) 841173

<sup>1</sup> Torgsin shops are those which accept only foreign cash.

fortress, which once guarded the northern approach to the mountain highway, one entered something like a gorge, where the River Terek, confined in a narrow and steeper valley, became a proper mountain torrent. Now one felt that the mountains were there indeed, though little could yet be seen of them.

Towards evening I approached the village of Lars. In the gathering darkness I had not noticed what had happened to the mist and clouds; but now, looking upwards between the steep walls of the valley, I saw a cloudless sky. The mist and rain were left down below on the plain. From this point I walked in sunshine.

At the former post-station of Lars are one or two modern one-storied dwelling-places, and there I had hopes of finding a bed for the night. Seldom has my quest for a resting-place been so quickly and easily concluded. I approached the first individual who appeared—a figure in fur coat and fur cap standing in idleness by the side of the road. He spoke Russian slowly and intelligibly, so I knew he could not be Russian himself—nor did he look it. He invited me to spend the night with him and led me into his bare but clean and spacious dwelling, which contained—a most unusual thing—a spare bed, which he offered me. On the table I found a single volume, which was a technical handbook for

veterinary surgeons, and in it, by way of a marker, was a large Apollo butterfly pressed flat like a flower; from this I rightly concluded that my host had charge of the health of the vast flocks of sheep which wander over the mountains, and that he took some interest in the natural world in general. He offered me mutton for supper (this is the one food that does not fail in the Caucasus); he had some bread, but not more than enough for himself. In the evening one of the vet.'s friends came in and conversed with him in a strange language. Afterwards he inquired if I knew what language they had been talking, but I did not. The language was Ossetian, and the vet. himself a member of the Ossete race.

The Ossetes are a people entirely distinct from the Georgians, and, unlike them, belong to the Indo-European family of races. In common with all the mountain peoples, they declared their independence after the revolution, and the Ossete country remains in the form of the 'Autonomous Areas' of Northern and Southern Ossetia. These lie to the west of the Georgian military road respectively to north and south of the watershed, the former being attached to the Russian, and the latter to the Transcaucasian Socialist Soviet Republic.

On my host's comfortable bed, and under the protection of a heavy overcoat he pro-

vided, I spent an excellent night. He would accept no remuneration, and at an early hour next day I parted from him, to proceed on my way towards Kazbek village.

Beyond Lars the road enters a gigantic cleft in the mountains, known as the Darial Defile, where space scarcely remains for a road beside the plunging Terek, whose bed in places is scooped in the solid rock. As I walked through this ravine in the early morning all was still dark below; but the tops of the crags thousands of feet above were lit with brilliant sunshine, which crept gradually lower over the yellow face of the rocks. It is a bare and stony place, unfriendly and forbidding in its splendour.

As one approaches Kazbek village the road rises high above the stream, and is cut in the still precipitous rock-wall of the valley. A spot where masses of rock overhang the road—a thing terrifying to the Russian unused to seeing the earth piled up above his head—bears the name 'Góspodi pronesi,' which means 'O God, take us past!'

At Kazbek is a little *baza* ('base') of the Proletarian Tourist Society, and here I established myself. The day was not far advanced, so, leaving my rather heavy load behind, I set off to explore the surroundings and make a first acquaintance with the Georgian people, the type of village they live in and the Georgian style

of architecture. Across the valley to the west rose a steep hill, and crowning it an ancient church and bell-tower; this was my objective—an alluring one, for I had come to these parts to photograph their ancient architecture, of which this was the first specimen I had found.

I became acutely conscious of the new land I had entered—a land as different from Russia as any in the world. No greater contrast could be found than that between the flat plain of Russia and this mountainous country; between the Russian peasant and the Georgian mountaineer; between the wooden *izby* (peasants' dwellings) of Great Russia and these terraced flat-roofed villages of the mountain people, clinging like the cells of some social insect to the steep sides of the valleys.

Passing a village, I came in view of a narrow valley with precipitous sides, and here a striking object met the eye. From the floor of the valley rose a high rock, on whose summit—and seemingly part of the rock itself—was built an ancient Georgian guard-tower, battered and worn, but still with a look of impregnability. Such towers—square and tall, immensely solid and thick-walled—abound throughout the Caucasus. From the earliest times they have been built and used by the Georgians as places of defence and retreat, and in the romantic district of Svanetia the people still dwell in such towers,

as did their ancestors thousands of years ago.

A laborious climb took me to the top of the hill, on which is perched the ancient church of Tsminda Sameba. This too, in mediæval times, had been a place of retreat, for the remains of fortifications surround it. Looking to the west one saw dimly through rolling clouds the snow and glaciers of high mountains, but their peaks were hidden from view.

It was not until next morning that the splendour of Mount Kazbek burst suddenly upon me, when I awoke and looked out between six and seven o'clock. The valley was still in twilight, and the sun would not reach it for several hours to come. But against the western sky, still dull though cloudless, there stood out the huge peak of Mount Kazbek, on which the sun shone with an astonishing brilliance, intensified by the gloom below.

This is a famous view of a famous mountain, which travellers in the old days made special visits here to see. Kazbek is perhaps the best known of Caucasian peaks, especially as the scene of the legend of Prometheus; for it was here that Zeus chained him to a rock and left him to the vultures. It is a fine volcanic cone of rather regular outline, rising to 16,545 feet—about the sixth among Caucasian peaks, though it surpasses Mont Blanc. In common with most of the higher mountains of this range, Kazbek rises not from

the principal watershed, but from a parallel ridge running to the north of it.

I had found by this time that the villages of the Georgian road had no sort of food supply accessible to a stranger, and I depended entirely on my own provisions, which fortunately were adequate. The Torgsin shops of Moscow had supplied me with cheese, butter, tinned fruit, sweet biscuits and raisins (which I found went well together) and chocolate; some friends had provided black bread. I was therefore blessed with a feeling of independence. But still it was essential to find cover for the night, for nights in the higher regions were frosty, and one could hardly have survived out of doors.

Though the nights were cold, the days were hot, and the walk from Kazbek to Kobi was, in spite of the altitude, the hottest during the week I spent in the mountains. From Vladikavkaz to Kazbek the valley of the Terek runs almost due south, but beyond Kazbek it turns south-westwards; the result, on the particular day when I passed through, was the entire loss of the breeze.

About seven miles from Kazbek is Sion, built on top of an eminence projecting into the valley. Here are an old Georgian basilican church and an imposing guard-tower in fine preservation.

As I pursued my way to Kobi, the heat seemed to increase, and I fell a prey to a violent

thirst. It was in vain that I looked about for water, until at last, within a mile of my destination, I came upon some springs just below the road, from which streams trickled on a bright rust-coloured bed. They were mineral springs, their waters slightly effervescent and most deliciously cool. Until that moment I did not know what refreshment might mean.

There are many such springs in the Caucasian region, and the waters of some—especially those of Borzhom—are bottled and sold in vast quantities in the street kiosks of the larger Russian towns.

Kobi offered a primitive lodging and eating-house. One entered first an earthen-floored room frequented by the public, and a door led out of here into an apartment for lodgers

—a room with boarded floor and on one side a broad and slightly sloping shelf on which to sleep. No bedding was provided, but a friendly Georgian who happened to be in the building offered me his *shuba* (sheepskin coat) as covering for the night. His was a large and powerful figure, and his huge *shuba*, composed, apparently, of several whole fleeces, weighed so heavily that one could scarcely lift it. A most welcome covering it proved; for a sharp frost came on overnight, as one might expect at a height above 6000 feet.

Beyond Kobi the road leaves the Terek and begins to ascend

of sheep here, as elsewhere on the road, accompanied by herds wearing large and shaggy sheepskin caps which hung over their eyes. The sheep are of the 'fat-tailed' variety; the base of the tail is enlarged to form two pendulous masses, which are said to provide the best meat in the whole animal.

The road in parts of its final lap to the pass is exposed to avalanches of snow and stones in spring, and for this reason long roofed tunnels have been built, through which one may pass in safety. At the time of my visit, however, they appeared to be in use as pens for the sheep, which at that season are taken down from their summer pastures to lower levels.

On the pass itself, at a little below 8000 feet, one has no great sense of elevation. It is flat and grassy, and affords no wide panoramas or glimpses of spectacular peaks. Yet one may feel some emotion in this place; for to pass it is to enter the ancient gateway of Transcaucasia, and to cross the natural and historic boundary between Europe and Asia.

Descending on the southern side, one appreciates, indeed, a real change in the nature of the country. Bleak, parched expanses and gaunt cliffs give place to gentler slopes with green meadows—somewhat dry, it is true, so late in the year—and at a lower level come tracts of forest. From a little distance below the pass one could look far down into the upper valley of the Aragva, whose course the road now follows all the way to its junction with the Kura not far above Tiflis. Very far away to the south one saw dimly the blue hills beyond the Kura valley, the border range of the tangled mountain system of Transcaucasia.

For some miles before dropping down to the river, the highroad follows a ridge above the right bank of the upper Aragva. Near Gudaur one traverses more tunnels. Then the road sweeps down on to a great grassy slope, describes many complicated windings and finally descends in a series of zigzags to the village of Mleti, at the bottom of the valley. I preferred to leave the road and pursue the ridge, which bears numerous Georgian villages with their flat-roofed stone houses. Here and there were guard-towers, which in this part are not square but more or less elliptical in form: some were very tall and slender, and had evidently served the purpose of look-out towers as much as places of defence. Some of the houses were larger than

others I had seen, having two storeys, and a wooden balcony supported on upright posts. In general, one gained here an impression of nature's luxuriance, in strong contrast with the barrenness of the northern slopes, and the villages themselves seemed to show a much greater prosperity.

I fell in with a companion-able Georgian going the same way, and he led me over what proved a much less easy route than I expected—a track only to be followed by one who knew it. It led down the valley-side—very rough and abrupt it was—till we landed, with some relief, at the bottom and crossed the noisy torrent of the Aragva by a footbridge.

The village of Kvishety, not far away, offered no hospitable roof, and I turned for help to the village *Ispolkom* (Executive Committee). The president and secretary were there, and they suggested I should sleep on the floor of the *Ispolkom* building itself. Both were Georgians, not particularly fluent in the Russian language, and they apparently took me for a Russian, as happened frequently in the Caucasian region. A foreigner would have aroused their considerable interest, if not their suspicions; and I was glad to remain a person of no consequence, to whom they paid little attention.

Having mastered the technique of sleeping on dirty wooden floors, I passed a good night in a corner of the room and next morning lost no time

in gathering up my things and proceeding along the road. For two days I walked in a leisurely way down the Aragva valley. It presented a great contrast with the wild gorges of the Terek on the northern side. Here on the south the slopes were gentler, and the rocks obscured by a copious covering of trees and bushes, now profusely splashed in bright autumnal colours. Occasionally, indeed, there were little precipices by the road, and here I met the most attractive of Alpine birds—the butterfly-like Wall-Creeper, which suddenly shows the scarlet patches on its wings as it flutters before the rock-face.

Passanaur, a large village pleasantly laid out beside the Aragva, has a *baza* of the Proletarian Tourist Society, and so, without trouble, I found a bed. In fact, I was alone there; the season for excursions in the mountains was past, and not a soul but myself appeared to be walking over the road. At Passanaur food is to be had—soup, mutton and *cashka*<sup>1</sup>—for it is here that passengers by the motor-buses are set down for a meal at mid-day.

At Ananur my quest for sleeping quarters proved futile. I was directed, however, to an old Georgian who kept an eating-house of the most primitive sort, and he, they told me, would accommodate a visitor. Next to the 'dining-room'

was the old man's tiny hovel, where he slept, cooked, and housed his lodgers. I found it littered with fragments of raw meat, not of the freshest, and the wooden shelves and chests which furnished this dwelling-place were all stained and reeking with the raw blood of many slaughtered sheep.

How it was that I remained in this place it is difficult now to say; but I did so, and have since been glad of it. Later in the evening the old man lit a stove to cook his meat; the smell improved; the hovel filled with smoke, which filtered out through cracks in the walls; the heat increased till the place was like an oven.

Then interesting visitors arrived. They were mountain tribesmen coming, I supposed, from one of the little Georgian villages which are built in terraces on the steep slopes of all the mountain valleys. None could speak one word of Russian, and my old friend of the hostility could not muster more than three or four. So I failed to find out more precisely who they were, or whence they came.

Striking and handsome figures they were, with their fur head-dress, their long embroidered coats drawn in at the waist, and their high boots. But their armament impressed me most forcibly of all. From a heavy leather belt, elaborately finished in silver, there hung a sheathed sword, a dagger and

<sup>1</sup> A sort of porridge made from various grains.

a round shield. To each side of their outer garment, in the position of a breast pocket, rows of ornamental cartridge-cases were attached; for these men carry guns, in addition, whenever procurable.

For centuries the Caucasian tribesmen have lived in a state of constant war and feud—hence the omnipresent guard-towers, and the men's habit, which persists in more peaceable times, of carrying a full complement of weapons even on ordinary occasions. There is hardly a valley in the Caucasus that does not harbour a distinct tribe, with its own particular dialect. These are a vigorous people, who offered a more formidable resistance to the Russians than any other in the Caucasus or beyond. It is claimed that some of the tribes were never under real control during the Tsarist régime, but that now the Soviet system of government has spread effectually throughout the mountains.

My host offered a sheepskin, spread over a sort of chest, whereon to pass the night. Thoughtlessly I lay down upon it, and being well tired, very nearly passed off to sleep. But not many minutes later, I became aware of a universal crawling and pricking, as the denizens of the sheepskin came out to take their nightly nourishment. I abandoned the skin and settled on a bench for the remainder of the night. But sleep would, at best, have been difficult; for as the hours

went by a terrible battle was waged between rival factions among the village dogs, and blood-curdling howls and snarlings continued ceaselessly just outside the much cracked wooden wall.

My last day's walk—the seventh—was a short one, from Ananur to Dushet. The road curves round the base of a height on which, in a commanding position, is built the old fortress of Ananur. It then leaves the Aragva valley, to join it again some twenty miles beyond.

The walk was easy and pleasant; the road led over a relatively low pass before dropping down again to the town of Dushet. But I chose a secluded spot, and made a long halt, to deal with the trophies of my short sojourn on the old Georgian's bedding the night before. Assiduously I removed from five or six infected garments a sufficiency of lice to populate a town-ship.

About mid-day I came down to Dushet. I had decided already to walk no farther if I could help it. I had come about a hundred miles, and my appetite for walking was satiated. I was down again at the same level as Vladikavkaz, and felt that the Caucasus was properly crossed. The last thirty miles to Tiflis I knew to be flat and monotonous. It was therefore a great good fortune to find a motor-bus about to start for Tiflis with hardly a passenger on board; for

it was going for some special reason, and nobody knew of it. In the overcrowded buses of the regular line I might never have found a place.

The coach was an old French one in terribly battered condition, but still doing good service. At the wheel was a desperate and mischievous driver, who pounded at full speed over the roughest parts of the road, as if determined to shatter the vehicle—not without success, for we suffered a burst tyre and several breakdowns, involving protracted delays. Moreover, our driver delighted to strike terror into passing peasants by swerving towards them and missing them

Just as darkness was falling, the crashing vehicle drew up before a garage in the outskirts of Tiflis, the great capital city of Georgia and all Transcaucasia.

## II. TIFLIS.

The evening of 19th October was a rather dreary one for me as I trudged the streets of Tiflis, making repeated futile attempts to find somewhere to spend the night. A hotel offered 'common' accommodation (several together in a dormitory) at 9 roubles, but a 'registration fee' had to be paid of 10 roubles—altogether £2, 17s. by the exchange rate—and this I was not prepared to pay. I sought out the local *baza*, but found it full. They directed me, however, to an overflow situated in a different part of the town.

I took tram No. 6 along a road which leads down to the old part of the town by the River Kura. With difficulty I

traced the overflow *baza* to the top storey of a great wooden building of the Turkish type, with tier on tier of balconies connected by outer wooden stairways. As I entered these lofty premises a strange sight confronted me. A Georgian youth—the deputy manager, someone told me, of the *baza*—was lying on his front on a bed just inside the door. In his hand was a grubby volume printed in the Georgian language, and from it the youth was reading aloud in a stentorian voice. Yet he had no audience; not a soul paid attention to this reading, which might have filled a hall. Judging by certain words common to every language, it was a

political work by Lenin or other revolutionary leader. I hesitated to disturb this enthusiast at his studies, but someone did so for me. He finished a paragraph, got up to show me to a bed, and immediately returned to resume his declamation to the walls and ceiling.

Two nights here were enough for me. The dormitory was overcrowded, for most of the beds touched other beds on both sides. Bed-bugs were too abundant to allow of peaceful nights. The floor was earthy and uncleanable. The washing-place was a stinking region in the middle of the building, where neither light nor air could ever be admitted from outside, and with a muddy and puddly floor.

I took the first opportunity to migrate to the principal *baza* of Tiflis, where I was destined to spend a considerable time in most favourable circumstances. It has two vast dormitories, one for men and the other for women. But since the baggage-room was only approachable by passing through the former, a constant succession of female travellers came through our premises at all hours of the day and night. But in Russia such conditions are nothing remarkable or unusual, and never cause the slightest awkwardness.

The dormitory was a very large room, with something between sixty and seventy beds arranged in four long

rows. There were no chairs or other furnishings, but a modicum of floor space was left between the rows, and here the lodgers—even when every bed was full—could live and move without undue congestion. As an act of kindness the manager allowed me to live and eat here at the lowest rate but one, to which I had no real title.

Food was provided in a kind of cellar below the dormitory. Three times a day one could procure a meal in exchange for a ticket bought beforehand at the office. I soon found—not only here but elsewhere in Transcaucasia—that food is far more plentiful in that part of the Union than in Moscow or the Far North, where I had lately been. That, however, did not mean that the *baza's* kitchen offered much variety. Usually the three meals in the day, and that for several days running, were exactly the same, except that a soup was provided in addition at mid-day; sometimes, too, a few grapes. A common menu was a 'cutlet,' (really a sort of rissole with a very small proportion of meat) with *casha* or rice, and a large chunk of black bread. Cups of tea were always to be had, generally with a small allowance of sugar, which could by no means be repeated at the same meal. Those who so wished could bring in what they pleased from the markets, and eat it in the dining-room, or make drinks with the help of the boiling water provided. The Russian never undresses

for the night. His undergarments are his night-clothes. Nor does he think of washing more than face and hands as a daily ritual. For a real wash he resorts to the bath-house about once a week, and the steam-bath often becomes something of a social occasion, when the spirits of the bathers rise unusually high. The baths of Tiflis are fed from natural hot springs of sulphurous water; it is from these, in fact, that Tiflis derives its name. Nowhere can one bathe so well and cheaply. The springs are a boon, too, to those housewives who live within reach of the streams that flow from them; hundreds can always be seen washing their linen there.

Tiflis is no commonplace city, and has much to show that is new and striking to any traveller. Round about the town on the west and south are high bare hills, and on one ridge the massive remains of an old Persian fortification. From here one may survey the whole town, with its many cone-roofed churches and the River Kura flowing through; while away to the north, on a clear day, one may see the central Caucasus with the huge peak of Kazbek, conspicuous though more than seventy miles away. Down in a steep-walled valley, behind the fortress walls, is an ancient botanic garden, established likewise by the Persians. It is one of the most romantic in the world, with its rocks and waterfalls, its winding

paths, and bridges spanning narrow ravines. By the river, and stretching up the steep hill below the fortress, is the native quarter of Tiflis. Its irregular streets, and picturesque wooden houses, with their ladders and balconies, comes and overhanging upper storeys, much resemble those of any Moslem town in the East. But what distinguish Tiflis most particularly are the ranges of dwellings built, as it were, in steps up the steep slopes which rise from both banks of the Kura—dwellings which in places seem to hang most precariously from the face of the rocks.

Along the principal streets, often in quarters so cramped that one wonders how the occupant can move his arms to work, live artisans of various races and religions. They seem to pursue their trade much as in pre-revolutionary times; there is at least no outward sign of socialisation. Here are the gold and silversmiths, whose beautiful work embellishes the famous Caucasian belts, swords and daggers. The River Kura, as it passes the lower part of the town, runs in a deep rock-cleft spanned by two bridges high above the water. From these bridges one may see rows of wooden dwellings built audaciously against the rock and overhanging the stream below. Crowning a cliff which rises sheer from the left bank is an old Georgian church with conical dome; it dominates the

whole of the ancient quarter of Tiflis.

Here, in the south, it seemed that private trading had escaped the devastating blows dealt it in the north by the Socialist offensive of the last few years. Markets were active and well supplied with fruits and vegetables, and milk products in variety, brought in by little donkeys carrying prodigious loads.

In other and more unfortunate ways Tiflis lags behind the towns of Russia. Beggars have not been cleared from the streets, and many deformed wrecks of humanity still disgrace the public places of the city. Yet more successful in their trade than these, are the tiny girls who have been taught to lie on rugs on the most crowded pavements, and whose pathetic looks evoke a stream of contributions from the throng of pedestrians who pass by constantly.

Wild and homeless boys,

such as have almost vanished from the streets of Moscow, may still be seen in Tiflis. At the time of my stay the nights were already cold, and the habits of these children—whom one cannot but admire for their ingenuity and daring—had become nocturnal. By night they could prowls about and so keep warm, while picking up their living by means best known to themselves. In the heat of the day they could rest comfortably in their shreds of clothing, and I found them blissfully sleeping among pro-

Russian women lie in wait for likely strangers, and offer them a hundred roubles and more for the pound that will buy them a dress or a coat, or supply their families with butter and sugar and cocoa for months to come. Since the banks offer no more than six and a half roubles for the pound, it is no wonder that few foreigners resist the temptation of dealing in the 'black' exchange.

In the hostels of the Proletarian Tourist and Excursion Society one meets an excellent sample of Russian revolutionary youth, as well as stray representatives of other sections in the population; and in the *baza* of Tiflis I found an interesting sprinkling of humble foreigners who by some means or other had found their way into the Soviet Union.

When a Communist youth or one of his sister co-religionists embarks on a conversation, one can be fairly sure of the course it will follow. The first question, of course, is whence one comes, and why? One's answer being, perhaps, unconvincing, a flicker of suspicion may sometimes be seen to pass over the countenance of the questioner. But he proceeds to ask one's opinion of the Soviet Union; whether things are better there or at home in England. A hesitant or qualified reply is the signal for a long discourse on Socialism and Capitalism, the horrors of exploitation and all the evils of private enterprise which

have been swept away in Russia with such splendid success. Sometimes I would persist that I was sympathetic with many of their ideals, but could not accept their methods; that in my own country at least the same results could be achieved by less violent means. "You are a Social Democrat," they would say, sometimes amused, more usually exasperated. I insisted that no party of that name existed in England, but this was no shelter from the aspersion cast upon me. Several times I attempted to turn myself to ridicule; insisted that I was born and bred a hopeless bourgeois, and could never be anything else. Not a smile could I raise; this was a most serious revelation. But worse was to follow. My friends would inquire where the money came from that enabled me to travel in Russia. Surely the English Government had sent me? How else could I come so far for months together? I admitted that some of the money came from interest on invested capital. "*Percentage!*" my catechist would repeat in slow and horrible tones, turning to exchange meaning glances with the attentive group of listeners. That I had been sent on some political mission by the home Government was an idea never far from their minds. And they believed that I must have inner knowledge of the intentions of our Government. Were we preparing for war with Russia? They had heard so.



Where exactly would the next intervention strike its first blow?

Prices were a topic of interest constantly raised, also the availability in England of various goods. Here I could easily point out a double contrast between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world: within the Union, a desperate shortage of all commodities, along with oceans of useless money; abroad, an excess of goods of every description which the population was too poor to buy. This provided another excuse for a detailed explanation of the effects of the five-year plan; why and how the shortage came about; its ephemeral nature, and the certainty that very shortly the balance would be redressed.

Wages were another subject of inquiry, and I was hard put to it to provide the exact and detailed information demanded. Whenever an audience fully understood my explanation of the English workman's standard of living, they were incredulous. But they could always, and rightly, point out the very different privileges and standing of the working people under Soviet rule; the provision for culture and entertainment, for rest and recuperation. Most telling of all, they could speak of unemployment, and how they alone, in all the world, had eliminated this symptom of a diseased society.

It was with some surprise that I heard one evening in the Tiflis *baza* the sound of an

English—or rather an American—voice, trying in vain to make itself understood by someone who had rashly claimed a knowledge of the English language. I found a young Jew from America, and quickly made friends with him. He was of 'petty bourgeois' origin, so he told me, and had become a Communist by conviction in his native land. At last he managed to come to Russia on a tour; having got into the country, he broke away from the tour, with the intention of remaining as long as he could. He had been teaching the children of English and American specialists at Dnieprostroi, the great new power station, but had come away expecting to find work elsewhere and see more of the Union. Unwillingly he admitted that so far he had found nothing to do and was quite at the end of his resources.

But nothing could damp the enthusiasm of this enterprising boy, and I found him as strong and convinced a Communist as ever he had been. He marvelled at the progress that had been made under conditions which might well have brought to nought a less ambitious programme than the five-year plan. To him, as to every Communist, the ends were all; the means counted for nothing. There might be destitution in the Ukraine (one heard much of this in the autumn of 1932); undeserved hardships might be imposed on the intelligentsia and on *kulaks*; but a classless society would be built,

and then only would the causes of discord and distress be gone for ever. He had passed through a pacifist stage, and still abhorred violence above all things. For that very reason he would fight, if the occasion arose, for the only social system under which further violence would be impossible. However the next war might start, it would resolve itself into one between the Soviet Union, together with the revolutionary proletariats of some other countries on one side, and the rest of the world on the other. He would not hesitate now to throw in his lot on the Soviet side; for with them, in his view, lay the only hope for the world. There were other foreigners.

I met two happy German couples who had migrated from their own country to find work in Russia, and were now enjoying their annual holiday in the south. They were far better off than was possible in Germany, and well pleased with their change of home.

A very strange individual turned up one day and occupied the bed next mine in the dormitory. Originally a German, he had lived in America and various other parts of the world. Hearing wonderful stories of Russia, he had collected dollars enough to bring him there. He described himself as an 'internationalist,' but, as far as I could ascertain, could speak no language whatever with any fluency. Now he felt disillusioned. In America anyone would give you a good

cup of coffee for the asking. Here there was no coffee—nothing! No one would give you any if there was.

Another German spent a night at the *baza*. A native of Königsberg, he had been taken prisoner in Russia during the war and had remained there ever since; there are many men in Russia with a similar history. He was employed at a bank in Batum, but was taking a long week-end off at Tiflis. For years past this man had spent his holidays cycling over the many splendid roads of Transcaucasia, including the two which traverse the Caucasus Mountains. He knew and loved this beautiful country, and had no desire to return to his native land.

Among the constant stream of Russians who came and went during my sojourn at Tiflis, I made friends with one who was the manager of a new tourist *baza* in Svanetia, a remote upland area in the western Caucasus. The extraordinary dishonesty of the primitive tribesmen of those parts necessitates the constant occupation of the *baza*, though for the seven months of winter all access to this lonely district from the plain is absolutely cut off. I was surprised to hear of the numbers of 'Proletarian tourists' who now use these 'bases,' even in remote places. The movement has grown simultaneously, and has much in common, with the Youth Hostels and kindred associations in other countries.

With my friend from America I set out on the 7th November to view the fifteenth anniversary celebration of the October revolution; for, owing to the change of calendar, what was 25th October has now become the date of which I speak. Throughout Russia the day is kept as a public holiday.

From an early hour police and soldiers were posted to prevent the population from streaming down into the central square and principal streets where the various processions would concentrate. Numbers of little boys were amusing themselves dashing past these guards, who pursued them for a few yards and then gave up the chase. Meanwhile, in every part of the town, contingents were preparing for their part in the great demonstration. About mid-day they began to converge on the centre of the city. We joined on to the end of one of the earlier processions, and so passed unmolested into the main street, there to take up our point of observation.

All the public buildings were decorated with red streamers and huge wooden effigies of revolutionary leaders. Every shop window had its bust of Lenin surrounded with red stars and hammers and sickles. Processions streamed through the streets in interminable succession. It seemed that most of the population were taking part in the demonstration itself.

And, indeed, these events are not intended as a display on

the part of the few for the contemplation of the majority; the participants themselves are those primarily intended to derive enjoyment and increased revolutionary fervour from the occasion.

There came by innumerable groups representing factories and institutions and trade unions, all with their flags and banners; athletic contingents; and large detachments from the youth organisations; while at intervals brass bands struck up stirring tunes. There were parties in lorries dressed up as Tsarist police, as top-hatted capitalists, or as priests with their robes and crosses—all for the derision and mockery of the onlookers. A procession of decorated fire-engines added variety to the spectacle; in the foremost sat the chief of the whole Tiflis brigade—a splendid Negro from Senegal, originally captured from a French regiment during the war. One saw little of military display, which is such a prominent feature of the Moscow demonstration.

While the thousands of demonstrators concentrated in the centre of the town, orators climbed wooden platforms erected beforehand for the purpose and shouted speeches to the throng; these were transmitted through amplifiers spaced at intervals down the streets.

The Russians have assuredly mastered the art of organising successful demonstrations. But their knowledge

of popular psychology has prompted them to more subtle measures. On these revolutionary anniversaries special food supplies are distributed to the whole population. By this means everyone is pleased—friend and foe alike—and this pleasure is inevitably associated with the revolutionary

### III. ARMENIA AND GEORGIA.

It was not through any wish of my own that I spent most of three weeks at Tiflis. Nothing could have been more irksome than this waste of precious time—intended for extensive journeys in Transcaucasia—which circumstances forced upon me. In official quarters at Moscow I had been assured that the renewal of my permit to reside in the Union was a matter of no difficulty and could be arranged in Tiflis. Very seriously was my informant mistaken, and on this account I was long detained against my will.

It would be distressing to me, and wearisome to the reader, to recall the succession of incidents which drove me from annoyance to exasperation, from exasperation to utter disgust with humanity in general, and obliged me to remain in Tiflis day after day in a state of futile idleness. Urgent telegrams to persons in Moscow who could have set things aright without trouble to themselves remained for weeks unanswered. Otherwise agreeable men in

Tiflis, who could have secured my permit with a stroke of the pen, would not do so; for they feared possible consequences to themselves. However, a few short expeditions, including two into Armenia, added much that was valuable to my stock of Transcaucasian experiences, and provided a tolerable set of photographs of the architectural objects of my journey. One day I returned to Mskhet, the ancient capital of Georgia. I repaired in good time to the station to catch an early morning train. Arriving half an hour before time, I thought there seemed a reasonable likelihood of finding at least standing room in the train. But I was vastly mistaken. Already the train was full up inside, and festoons of travellers were hanging on the carriage steps unable to force an entry. I took up a position on the buffers of a carriage and awaited developments.

In time the train moved off, most of the buffers fully occupied. It stopped at an-

other station to pick up more passengers. We had to make room for them, and there was nothing for it but to move up one stage farther on to the roof; there I completed the journey in comfort.

Mtskhet was capital of the Georgian kingdom until the sixth century, when Tiflis replaced it. Now it is a dirty and rather lifeless village, but adorned with some splendid churches in the Georgian style, and beautifully placed at the junction of the Rivers Kura and Aragva. Looking across the Aragva valley one sees a high hill, precipitous on the nearer side. On top of the hill, and on the very verge of the precipice, stands one of Georgia's most ancient shrines, built more than thirteen centuries ago.

Below the junction of the two rivers is 'Zages'—the Transcaucasian hydro-electric station. It was the first of the great engineering works undertaken in that part of the Union, and the great pride of all Transcaucasia, until other and greater works eclipsed it. Adjoining the dam stands a gigantic statue of Lenin, visible for miles around. The barrage itself provides a bridge over the river, and when the train stopped not far from it, I came down off the roof to go across that way and so shorten my route. I was met by a soldier with fixed bayonet, who told me that no one might walk over without a permit. So I was obliged to make a

circuit of several miles to reach the same spot.

I climbed the hill on which stands the sixth century church, which is such a striking object in the beautiful surroundings of Mtskhet. From the top of the hill which it crowns, there opened up another unforgettable view of Mtskhet itself, spread out far below by the flooded Aragva, and of the Kura, winding away into the distance.

This hill-top was a delightful and unspoilt spot. But a gloom hung over it. Close by the ancient church was a grave, newly dug, in which lay the old man who for years had been caretaker there. He had been murdered only a few days before by the bandits still at large in this district. It was an act of pure revenge; for the old man had recognised one of their number in Mtskhet and given him away to the police. The hovel in which he had lived—one of the most primitive I ever saw—could have furnished nothing of value to the murderers.

Walking back to Tiflis in the evening along the left bank of the Kura, I passed military encampments. Beyond, I fell in with a group of prisoners, or convicts of some kind, marching ahead of a soldier heavily armed. The soldier motioned me to keep clear, and whistled loudly as if to summon a colleague. Evidently this was a place where I should not have been, but no one came to molest me,

and I walked on along the posts, manned by soldiers, who keep a constant watch on every yard of the frontier. From a certain section of the line one can see distinctly the walls of Ani—the ancient and deserted capital of the Armenian kingdom—lying on the Turkish bank of the Arpa Chai. I was contemplating these mediæval walls with field-glasses, when one of the soldiers who patrol the trains in that part of their journey, came into the carriage and started a tiresome cross-examination. Who was I? Why was I in the train? Why looking through field-glasses? A friendly Georgian schoolmaster who happened to be in the carriage took part in defending my innocence, and at last the scowling soldier went on.

On the last day of October I left Tiflis for Erivan by a train at midnight. Next morning we were at Leninakan (formerly Alexandropol), and the rest of this interesting journey could be enjoyed by daylight. The line circles round the vast mass of Mount Alagöz (or Aragatz), the only mountain of this district, apart from Ararat, which rises above the snow-line. Both these mountains are volcanic, but Alagöz resulted from outpourings of a more fluid lava, and is therefore less steep and imposing than Ararat. Nevertheless, as seen from one stretch of the railway, its several peaks, rising above 13,000 feet from dazzling snowfields, which just caught the light of the sun, were a sight not soon to be forgotten.

For some distance the train carries one close to the Arpa Chai, a small river which here forms the frontier between the Soviet Union and Turkey. At intervals we passed look-out

Along the railway signs could be seen of the greatest new enterprise in Armenia—irrigation. The pumping-stations of Leninakan and elsewhere now supply water to a network of canals which have made vast tracts of barren land fertile and habitable. It is by this means that Soviet Armenia—the only Armenia that now exists—has been able to absorb thousands of refugees from Greece and other countries. Cotton was growing on the irrigated fields.

During the last part of the journey Ararat itself loomed into view. Ararat, I suppose, is one of the world's most celebrated mountains, whether as the reputed resting-place of the Ark or as the symbol of

Armenia as truly as Fuji is the symbol of Japan. And Ararat will not disappoint the expectant traveller. In one sweep it rises from the level plain to 17,000 feet; a shapely cone which looks its height, standing in splendid and unchallenged isolation. Only the Little Ararat, a lesser cone rising from its eastern flank, breaks into the regular outline of this huge and impressive peak.

About 4 P.M. we arrived at Erivan. A wind was blowing, and while walking from the station to the town I realised that this might well be—as I had heard—the dustiest town in Transcaucasia. The streets were seas of fine sand and dust, through which one waded, ready at any moment to cover the eyes when a thick cloud of it was whirled into the air.

Few towns in the Soviet Union have undergone such transformation in the last few years as has Erivan. A new city, on a new plan, is being imposed upon the old. Everywhere old buildings are being ruthlessly torn down, and new ones—many of them novel and striking specimens of modern architecture—are rising from the scene of devastation.

In the absence of a *baza* I made my way to the *Dom Kolkhoznika* ('House of the Collective Farmer'), a type of lodging-place universal in Russia, but not so common in Transcaucasia. I had stayed

in many such places from time to time, but never in one like this. Strict and extraordinary regulations were most rigidly enforced. The dormitories were not opened until nine o'clock in the evening, and everyone was obliged to turn out before nine in the morning. Not a single item of baggage, however small, was allowed in the dormitory; everything had to be taken to the baggage-room.

I asked whether meals could be had here. I was told not, but there was a tea-room; the tea-room, however, did not provide tea, because it was undergoing alterations. Was *anything* to be had? Yes, anyone who liked could get five kopeks worth of black bread. This at least was a privilege, for the same fragment of bread on the market would have cost a rouble.

The passport officials at Tiflis had at last told me—with the sole motive of ridding themselves of a tiresome customer—that for certain reasons, which I found to be quite fictitious, it would be simpler to arrange the extension of my permit in Erivan. And it came about that I spent almost the whole of my two days in Erivan—occasionally arguing with exasperating officials, mostly waiting in idleness—attempting to achieve what was an impossible thing. I could do no more than escape once to the top of a neighbouring hill, where was an old Armenian cemetery, and thence contemplate the snowy peak of Ararat hanging

high in the air over what was once Armenia.

On my second evening in Erivan I returned to the *Dom Kolkhoznika*. As usual, a crowd was waiting at the office window, and not for half an hour or more could I speak with the individual inside. According to the customary arrangement, one was required, at this lodging-place, to give up one's 'document' (passport) when paying for lodging, and reclaim it next day. I had done so the night before, but to-day had been obliged to leave the passport with officials at the town Soviet. The youth at the window demanded my document, and I explained where it was; but he was not interested. "Have you got a document?" he asked. "Yes or no? No? Then you cannot stay here." I persisted that everyone knew I had spent the previous night there, and had left a passport at the office; my things were still in the baggage-room. "Have you a document?" he said again, as if incapable of articulating any other set of words. I abandoned this inhospitable place and the sodden-brained creature in charge.

My only alternative to a night in the streets was to impose myself on some good people to whom I carried a letter of introduction, though a guest, I knew, would be inconvenient to them. Their hospitality, however, did not fail me, and I passed the night in their pleasant three-

room flat in one of the modern blocks which have lately been erected.

Such comfortable and spacious 'quarters' as these are a scarce thing in the Soviet Union just now, where families must often be content to live in a single room. The holder of the flat in question was one of those Armenians who fled into Soviet territory during the war, and so escaped massacre by the Turks. Now, as an official in the geological service, he was as well off as anyone could be during the difficult period of the five-year plan, and well provided with most necessities of life.

Faced with the expiry of my visa almost immediately, I was forced back to Tiflis. By dint of a supreme final effort, and with the co-operation of a pleasant young official in the foreign department of the Tiflis Soviet, I secured a short prolongation of the visa. I had found the race of officials so uniformly tiresome in these parts, that to find a friendly one was a most welcome relief. But his goodwill exceeded his care and accuracy, and through a mistake in the date I was put to further trouble at Batum.

A few days later I left again on a flying visit to Armenia, by the same train at midnight. Taking my place, as is always essential, about two hours before the train started, I found the usual queue well established and already of alarming length. From time to time someone arrived and appeared

to break into the queue. Then a storm of protest was raised, but if the invader paid no attention and remained long enough where he was, the uproar subsided until provoked once more. In any case, no one would respect the queue once the barrier was raised and the horror of the *posadka* begun. Then it is a case of 'every man for himself.' The most athletic forge through the crowd, dash to the train and capture places for themselves and their parties. A group travelling together appoint certain of their number for this important work; the rest follow at leisure with the baggage. The individual traveller who carries baggage is lucky if he finds standing room in the more crowded trains.

On the occasion in question I was lightly laden, and by good fortune was just in time to secure the last berth in the carriage I had entered. But I was afraid to sleep, in case of missing my destination, Allaverdi, which the train would reach about 5 o'clock next morning. The train had been going about a quarter of an hour, and I was enjoying the sense of being once more on the move, when a soldier came through the carriage and asked, quite politely, for my passport. He examined it attentively, and then returned the way he had come.

At 5 A.M. I turned out of the train and took refuge from the cold in the little waiting-room at Allaverdi Station. Here

I had to wait between two and three hours, until the darkness should be sufficiently dispelled for one to feel a way out of the valley. On the waiting-room floor a whole family was encamped. Father, mother and two or three pathetic little children lay there in a row all fast asleep. When I returned that evening, there they were again, all asleep as before. Whether they resided here in permanence, or what brought them to so unattractive a lodging, I did not find out.

I had come to this spot with a view to a long walk in the surrounding hills, which would take me to two ancient Armenian monasteries. These I wished particularly to photograph, having failed to achieve anything in the region of Erivan. As a faint touch of daylight came into the sky, one gradually became aware of the surrounding country, which has a most remarkable formation. The railway runs at the bottom of a deep valley, or rather gorge, with towering walls which appear, at first sight, unclimbable. In the dawning daylight I set off to scale these heights, and crossed the river by a magnificent one-spanned bridge, dating from the thirteenth century. Thence a good path ascends the side of the valley in innumerable zig-zags. The ascent seemed endless. But after about an hour's climbing I arrived, suddenly and unexpectedly, at the edge of the gorge, and emerged on a wide expanse of green and

fertile country with scattered villages. From a little distance one saw no more than the top of the deep gorge, which looked like a narrow crack in the earth's surface, hardly interfering with the broad contours of the upland region. It was strange to think of the river and the railway running along far down at the bottom, and as strange, when travelling in the train, to imagine this populous highland of which no trace could be seen from below.

Passing by the village and monastery of Sanain (for there was not yet light for photography) I proceeded northwards towards Haghpat. As yet the hills were mostly enveloped in mist, and one could not see the village ahead. Perhaps it was as well, for a full view of the route, which I was to cover twice that day, would have been discouraging. Actually it was revealed to me bit by bit. Again and again I came to narrow gullies, slow and laborious to cross, and each in turn I hoped would be the last. Finally, the mist cleared and the village itself came in view; close by, to be sure, but separated from me by a bottomless ravine with walls so steep that it seemed untraversable. However, searching minutely along the edge, I found the beginning of a track and started on the steep descent. An hour later I arrived, exhausted, on the opposite side, and climbed the rocky path which leads to the obscure village of Haghpat.

The intrusion of a foreigner in such a place as Haghpat—which is unapproachable by wheeled vehicles—must be an uncommon event, and the president of the local Soviet came out to inquire who I might be and what I was doing. He was not, however, unfriendly, and I was left to photograph the picturesque old monastery in peace, hampered only by the mist which every now and then came down and blotted out the light and landscape.

In the course of the afternoon I made my way back by the same laborious route to Sanain. There I was accosted by a smiling individual whose curiosity was much aroused by the unusual spectacle of a photographer wandering about the monastic buildings. He was a Greek—there are many of his race in this region—and worked here as an agricultural expert. He invited me into his very cramped quarters and offered bread and cheese for supper. It was from him I learned that this area, which I knew to have been a stronghold of the Armenians during the Middle Ages, had played its part in the disturbed history of quite recent years. After the revolution, when all the Transcaucasian peoples declared independent republics and sought to extend their areas, the Georgians invaded this valley. The uplands, however, proved impregnable. When the Georgian army attempted to scale the valley-

side, the Armenians sent avalanches of stones down upon their heads, and they retreated in confusion. Such, at least, was the story I heard.

Some time after dark I was back at the station of Allavardi. The first train to Tiflis was full up, and I failed to secure a ticket. The next would not pass until 2 A.M. The waiting-room was crowded, and one could find nowhere to lie or sit except outside, and there it was too cold. Then there was a threat that the second train, too, would be full. True enough, a few tickets were sold, but before my turn came the booking-office window shut. In desperation I forced my way to the booking clerk, brandished my passport and assured him that I had important business at the State Bank in Tiflis next day—and this was true enough. For once this worked, and I procured a ticket.

Not without reason, I soon found, had the output of tickets been limited. The entire train, except a single small coach, was reserved for holders of place-tickets, and was full. The one remaining coach was more than full. One could find no space to sit, even on the floor; there was scarcely standing room, either inside or on the end platforms. But at least one was spared the misery of a glaring light and the loud talk which generally continues, on such journeys, throughout the night. No other light was provided than the *providnik's*

candle, which he lit only at the stations; and in the darkness the passengers were silent. Occasionally, when the *providnik* left his own seat, I dropped into it for a few minutes, till he returned. But for the last hour or so of the journey the good man left me in possession. So when the train drew in to Tiflis station at dawn, I felt a little refreshed, and was better prepared for the unexpected happenings of the coming day.

A message awaited me at the *baza* to the effect that a telegram from Moscow had been received, which would at once enable me to obtain any prolongation I liked of my permit to reside in the Union. Good news, which I had awaited for weeks past—but unofficial.

Not long afterwards a militiaman arrived at the *baza* and invited me to follow him to the passport office. I suspected nothing, but supposed the office would now at last satisfactorily settle the matter. Then were the tables turned with startling suddenness. Gravely the head of the department informed me that, by a *príkaz* (order) of the town Soviet passed that morning, I was required to leave Tiflis immediately. A militiaman would be provided to 'assist my departure' for Batum that same evening.

Somewhat dazed by this turn of events, I wandered slowly back to the *baza*. To the amazement of the staff, who now knew me well, I announced my expulsion from the town. By this time every

Government department was closed, and it seemed futile to attempt anything further. I still had matters to attend to in Tiflis, and these occupied me till the evening. I returned to the militiaman expecting soon to leave the country, and me. In due course we started off by tram to the station.

For the third time I found myself waiting in the spacious railway station of Tiflis for a train which would leave at midnight; but now for the first time provided with an escort, I was determined that he should really justify himself. I established myself comfortably on a bench and let him procure a ticket for me. Having missed two nights of normal rest, I soon relapsed into a doze, leaving my baggage to the militiaman's care. I was aroused by a violent kick on the foot, dealt me by a soldier on the prowl about the station. "Sleeping is not allowed here," he remarked. The militiaman was furious that his charge should be treated thus; he told me to sleep in peace, and that he would protect me from any further interference. Before the rush of the *posadka*, I was smuggled into the train for Batum, and prepared for one of the best of the many nights I have spent on wooden berths in Russian trains.

I awoke to find the world in broad daylight; and the train, having crossed the watershed, was now following a little stream flowing westwards to the Black Sea. By mid-day two guests — another woman

we were skirting the sea coast to itself, and at one o'clock the train drew into Batum. For the first time since entering the Union I accepted the services of a porter. I was soon to leave the country, and might as well dispose of my remaining roubles; for it is impossible to exchange them for any other currency. These porters are all disfranchised persons, without food tickets, who must live on whatever can be bought in the open market. But they make so many roubles (the tips demanded often exceed the cost of a railway journey) that they fare not badly. Thus comes about the anomaly that the outcasts of society are richer in roubles than the most privileged; but they are denied the right to use this money to the same advantage.

I requested the porter to take me to a lodging-place. "Would you not prefer to stay with a private hostess?" he asked; "you will have the place to yourself — it's much pleasanter than a dormitory." And I agreed. He led me into a cobbled yard, into which opened the doors of a number of 'quarters.' My hostess was an agreeable Georgian woman, living with her little boy in a single room. The room, as I afterwards found by measurement, was eleven feet square and about the same height; a cubical apartment, somewhat cramped indeed, but not badly ventilated. She already had two guests — another woman

and her child—who occupied a kind of couch on one side of the room. I could see no other accommodation, but it turned out that a kind of wooden bedstead, which by day leant up against the wall outside, could be brought in at night. Where accommodation is scarce, one does not despise this type of lodging, and I remained there quite happily for a week before leaving for Constantinople.

My relations with the landlady were most friendly. And the mixture of sexes in her small premises was no inconvenience to anyone; for with Russians, and those who adopt their habits, these things call for no comment, and are taken as a matter of course. At night my hostess did make a feeble barrier between our respective beds by hanging some pieces of cloth over the backs of two chairs; but this process seemed hardly more than symbolic in the circumstances.

Roubles are of little use to anyone, and the payment I made was mainly in the form of Torgsin products; it was a pleasure to see the boundless joy they gave—simple groceries like sugar, macaroni and cooking oil. My hostess was not a bad cook, and with the marvellous supplies I brought in she produced some excellent dishes. I fed better here than I had yet in the Union.

Various practical matters kept me inevitably in Batum for some days. But before finally quitting Transcaucasia I fitted in a rapid journey to

Kutais, the capital of Western Georgia, and visited from there the old Georgian monastery of Gelati. Leaving Batum in the afternoon, I was at Kutais a little after midnight, and set off to find a lodging-place. On the way from the station to the town I was suddenly confronted by a soldier with fixed bayonet in a menacing attitude. He told me to walk on the other side of the road. By 1 A.M. I had found a hotel with a spare bed in one of its dormitories.

Next morning I covered the few kilometres to Gelati by an attractive light railway which runs up into the mountains. From Gelati Station one ascends by rough paths to the monastery itself, which is perched on the hillside, in view of the high snow mountains of the central Caucasus. Good fortune was with me, for the day was perfect, and the beautiful surroundings of Gelati showed up to full advantage. A ridge above the monastery commanded a panorama to the south; beyond the valley of the Rion and its tributary the Kvirila, one could see the ranges of the Little Caucasus, which merge southwards into the highlands of Armenia.

Walking back by a rather different route, I accompanied for a mile or two the River Rion, on which Kutais lies. This river is the ancient Phasis, to which the English pheasant owes its name, for here was the bird's native place. Just above Kutais a large hydro-electric

station, 'Rionges,' was in left, because new snow had course of construction, guarded, fallen on the mountains, and as usual, by well-armed soldiers. they stood out as a long white streak with jagged edge, at an average distance of a hundred and thirty miles.

Batum exists primarily to export the oil of Baku. It is the terminus of a pipe-line from Baku, and every day trains of petroleum tanks arrive to fill the vessels which will carry it over the world. One day no less than fifteen foreign tankers were lying in the harbour. Few other vessels call here, except a fortnightly Italian, carrying mixed cargo and passengers. I was due to sail for Constantinople on 18th November.

Though the steamer was not to sail until 6 P.M., passengers were required to attend at the Customs station in the docks at 11 in the morning. I found a number of passengers already assembled there, including some Persians who were being deported (as I afterwards found) for smuggling or money trafficking across the Soviet frontier. We waited about two hours before the Customs officials arrived. Then there began a series of long-drawn-out individual examinations, which lasted on until past the steamer's sailing hour. At surprisingly long intervals the name of some passenger was called. He was taken away into an inner room, not to reappear. Hour after hour went by. A G.P.U. (political police) officer paced up and down the waiting-room. The

Batum is a pleasant enough place. The climate on the whole is very mild, so that palm-trees grow in the streets and all sorts of tropical plants in the parks. Along the sea-front gardens are laid out, and from here, or from the shingly beach below, something really striking may be seen on a clear day. Looking to the north and north-east one sees, spread out along the horizon, about half the entire length of the Caucasian chain. All the more striking was this view when it became visible a day or two before I

passengers were depressed and silent.

Late in the afternoon my name was called at last. In the inner room a very legion of officials was in readiness. I counted nine of them—some genuine Customs officials, some soldiers, some G.P.U.—but others turned up in the course of the proceedings. They started a minute and painstaking examination of the entire contents of my baggage, reducing to terrible wreckage the mass of small objects which I had carefully packed into my knapsack, suit-case and food-bag. Every little receptacle was emptied of its contents; every fragment of paper scrutinised. Some powdered food was turned out of its tin and searched through; a loaf of bread was torn in half, lest something should be contained in it. This search completed, I was invited to produce the contents of my pockets. The question was then put: Had I anything more to show? One could not have done otherwise, at that stage, than answer "No." The official in charge of operations now signalled to a certain comrade, whom I had already noticed on account of his particularly bestial coun-

tenance, to perform his part of the work. This was a prolonged search of one's person and garments.

The examination lasted over an hour. Towards the end I was informed that certain articles would be withheld: note-books, diary, account book, maps, a number of loose papers and letters; and—it was this alone that really mattered—my entire collection of architectural photographs. In these were concentrated the whole results of three and a half months' arduous travelling, undertaken for the special purpose of securing them. To abandon them here was peculiarly painful. But no alternative was left. To remain in Batum would have been impossible, and the steamer was about to sail. Thinking that a burst of anger would be less favourable to retrieval than a show of sorrow, I let things be. Dolefully I went on board the vessel which would carry me away from the Soviet land, doubtful whether my work would ever be seen again.

Efforts made by the Soviet Embassy and certain friends in London resulted in the ultimate recovery of the photographs.

*Written as a footnote*