

ESSAYS

ON

EASTERN QUESTIONS.

BY

WILLIAM GIFFORD PALGRAVE,

AUTHOR OF 'CENTRAL AND EASTERN ARABIA.'

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VIII.

THE ABKHASIAN INSURRECTION.

‘Like doth quit like, and measure still for measure.’

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NOTICE.

THE events recorded in this Essay had some degree of publicity at the time, and were considerably distorted and misrepresented in European periodicals. Circumstances rendered me, shortly after, a resident in Abkhasia itself, and thus gave me special facilities for investigation of what had happened. In the facts here narrated, we have a fair sample of one of those many outpost struggles, in which Christian Russia has been pitted against semi-barbarous Caucasian Islam; the ultimate result has been much the same in every instance. It may interest the reader to know, that in the following year between twenty and thirty thousand of the Mahometan remnant in the West Caucasus provinces emigrated into Turkey, and settled there, thus making the loss of Russia the gain of her neighbour.

‘So’OUK-SOO,’ or ‘Cool Waters,’ is one of the loveliest spots in the lovely province of Abkhasia. Lying only a few miles inland from the eastern Black Sea shore, and on the first rise of the wooded Caucasus, a day’s ride north of the town and harbour of Soukhoum-Kalé, it was from old times a favourite summer residence of the chiefs of Abkhasia; their winter was more often

passed at Drand or Otchemchiri, further down the coast.

But in addition to its natural beauty and residential importance, this locality has acquired a special title to almost European interest since August, 1866, when it became the scene and starting-point of an outbreak—disguised in distorted newspaper accounts under fictions of brigandage, slave-driving, and the like, but which was in fact nothing else than an Eastern re-enactment of events familiar, since 1830, to Warsaw and the Western Provinces of the Russian Empire.

During the month of November, 1866, while the memories of the Abkhasian insurrection were still recent, and the lingering autumn of the Caucasus yet permitted horse-travelling (for in winter these mountains become totally impassable), we—that is, myself with a Mingrelian servant and guide—arrived at So'ouk-Soo, after a ten hours' ride from Soukhoun-Kalé, through bush and forest, stream and mire. Roads are luxuries often announced in programme, sometimes talked of, but never seen in these provinces. It was already dark when, after much clambering and slipping, we found ourselves on a sort of plateau, entangled in a labyrinth of hedges, where scattered lights glimmered among the brushwood, and dogs barking in all directions gave us to know that we had reached So'ouk-Soo. Like most other Abkhasian villages, its houses are neither ranged in streets nor grouped in blocks, but scattered as at random, each in a separate enclosure. The houses themselves are one-storied and of wood, sometimes mere huts of wattle and clay; the enclosures are of cut stakes, planted and interwoven latticewise; the spaces between these hedgerows serve for the passage of countless goats and oxen that pass the night within their master's precincts, and go out to pasture during the day. Old

forest-trees, fresh underwood, bramble, and grass grow everywhere, regardless of the houses, which are often in a manner lost among them; one is at times right in the middle of a village before one has even an idea of having approached it.

After much hallooing and much answering in sibilants and gutturals,—really the Abkhasian alphabet seems to contain nothing else,—we prevailed on some peasants to get up and guide us through the darkness to the house of the ‘Natchalnick,’ or Governor of the district. Here we passed the remainder of the night with his Excellency, a Georgian by birth, and, like every one else of these ilks, who is not of serfish origin, a prince by title, but now an officer in the Russian army, into which the ‘natives,’ fond as negroes of gay dress and glitter, are readily attracted by lace and epaulettes. Many of the ‘princes’ of the land—elsewhere chiefs or sheykhs at most—have, on this motive, with the additional hope of a decoration, assumed the badges of Russian military service, wherein they easily obtain subordinate posts; and there aid as spies or as tools in disarming the constantly recurring discontent of their countrymen, till some day or other their own personal discontent breaks out, and then the tool, no longer serviceable, is broken and thrown aside, to be replaced, where wanted, by another.

Early next morning, while the dew glittered on the rank grass, and the bright sun shone slant through the yet leafy trees, we rode, accompanied by the ‘Natchalnick’ and his whole suite of Georgians and Mingrelians in Cossack dress, to visit the ‘Meidan’ of So’ouk-Soo, where the first shot of insurrection had been fired four months before.

A ‘Meidan,’ or ‘open ground,’ is—all know who have visited the East—the necessary adjunct of every

town or village honoured by a chieftain's residence. It serves for town-hall, for park, for parade-ground, for scene of all public gathering, display, business, or amusement. On it is invariably situated the chief's or governor's abode; a mosque, if the land be Mahometan, a church, if Christian, is never wanting; the main street or artery of the locality terminates here. Lastly, it is seldom devoid of a few large trees, the shade of loiterers.

The Meidan of So'ouk-Soo offers all these characteristic features, but offers them after a manner indicating the events it has witnessed, and the causes or consequences of those events. It is an open book, legibly written by the Nemesis of history, 'the measure for measure,' the reciprocated revenges of national follies and national crimes.

'Which living waves where thou didst cease to live,' says Byron, contrasting the quiet prolonged existence of great nature with the short and turbulent period of human life. Much the same feeling comes over one at So'ouk-Soo. The green grassy plot dotted with noble trees—beech, elm, and oak; around, the swelling uplands, between which the 'cool waters' of the torrent—whence the name of the place—rush sparkling down to the blue sea; beyond, the huge Caucasian mountain-chain, here seen in all its central magnificence of dark forest below and white fantastic peaks above, in unearthly wildness of outline beyond the dreams of the most enthusiastic pre-Raphaelite landscape-painter; above, the ever-varying sky; around, the fresh hill-breeze: the chiefs of Abkhasia could not have found in all their domains a fairer, a more life-giving place for their residence. But another story is told by the traces of a ruined mosque on one side of the Meidan, and near it some neglected tombs bearing on the carved posts—

which here replace monumental stones—the Mahometan symbolic turban. Close by are four wooden crosses, sunk and awry, freshly planted in the still loose mould of as many recent graves. Next, the blackened walls and empty windows of a large burnt house surrounded by a broken stone-wall. Further on, a second fire-ruin, amid the trees and shrubs of a yet thickly-growing garden. Opposite, on the other side of the Meidan, and alone intact and entire, as though triumphing over the ruin it has in no small measure caused, stands a church—a small building of the semi-Byzantine style usual in Russian and Georgian ecclesiastical architecture hereabouts. Close by is a large house, symmetrically built, with a porch of Greek marble and other signs of former display. But all within has been gutted and burnt: the long range of stone windows opens into emptiness, the roof has fallen in, and the marble columns are stained and split with fire. Here, too, in the same strange contrast of life and death, a beautiful garden, where the mixture of cypress and roses, of flowering trees and deep leafy shrubbery, betokens Turkish taste, forms a sideground and a background to the dismantled dwelling. Some elms and a few Cossack-tenanted huts complete the outer circle of the Meidan.

Each one of these objects has a history, each one is a foot-print in the march of the Caucasian Nemesis, each one a record of her triumph and of her justice.

The ruined mosque and turban-crowned tomb-posts recall the time when Mahometanism and submission to the great centre of orthodox Islam, Constantinople, was the official condition of Abkhasia. This passed into Russian rule and Christian lordship; and the Nemesis of this phase is marked by the wooden crosses under which lie the mutilated corpses of Colonel Cognard, Russian Governor-General of Abkhasia, of Ismailoff,

Russian 'Natchalnick' of So'ouk-Soo, of Cheripoff, the Tifis Commissioner, and of Colonel Cognard's aide-de-camp: they perished in the outbreak of August. The large burnt house close by was the abode of Alexander Shervashiji, brother of the last native chief of Abkhasia. Less than half a century since the family bartered national independence and Islam against Russian popes and epaulettes. Their Nemesis has come too. In this very house Cognard and his suite were slaughtered. The ruin close by was once the residence of the ill-famed 'Natchalnick' Ismailoff; it recalls the special vengeance of licentious tyranny—how, we shall see afterwards. The church, alone yet intact, is of old date and of Georgian construction—once abandoned, then revived and repaired by the regenade Shervashijis, its Nemesis is now in its lonely silence. The ruin of hewn stone, Turkish in style, was the palace of Michael Shervashiji, the last native-born ruler of the province. Russian in uniform, Abkhasian at heart, true to his own interests, false to those of others, he constructed this palace on his return from a visit to the west: it inaugurated the beginning of a late return to the old Ottoman alliance; but with the general fate of return movements—especially when undertaken after their time—it inaugurated also his own ruin and that of his nation. The Cossack and Abkhasian huts further on were yet tenanted in November last: they are now empty.

We alighted, visited these strange memorials one by one, heard the story of each, remounted our horses, galloped up and down the springy turf of the Meidan, and then plunged into the deep wooded ravine north-east, and left the scene of inconstancy, violence, and blood, on our way to the districts of Bzibb and northern Abkhasia.

But our readers must halt a little longer on the Meidan if they desire to understand the full import of the tragedy of which we have just seen the stage decorations.

Of the early history of the Abkhasian race little is known, and little was probably to be known. More than two thousand years since 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 autochthons arrived, what was the cradle of their infant race, to which of the great 'earth-families,' in German phrase, this little tribe, the highest number of which can never have much exceeded a hundred thousand, belonged, are questions on which the past and the present are alike silent. Tall stature, fair complexion, light eyes, auburn hair, and a great love for active and athletic sport, might seem to assign them a Northern origin; but an Oriental regularity of feature, and a language which, though it bears no discoverable affinity to any known dialect, has yet the Semitic post-fixes, and in guttural richness distances the purest Arabic or Hebrew, would appear to claim for them a different relationship. Their character, too, brave, enterprising, and commercial in its way, has yet very generally a certain mixture of childish cunning, and a total deficiency of organising power, that cement of nations, which removes them from European and even from Turkish resemblance, while it recalls the so-called Semitic of south-western Asia. But no tradition on their part lays claim to the solution of their mystery, and records are wanting among a people who have never committed their vocal sounds to writing; they know that they are Abkhasians, and nothing more.

Pagans, like all early nations, they received a slight whitewash of Christianity at times from the Byzantine Empire ; at times from their Georgian neighbours ; till at last the downfall of Trebizond and the extension of the Ottoman power on their frontier by sea and by land rendered them what they have still mostly remained, Mahometans. Divided from time immemorial into five main tribes, each with its clannish subdivisions, the un-euphonic names of which we pass over out of sheer compassion to printers and readers, they first, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, received a common master in the person of Tahmuras-khan, a Persian by birth, native of Sherwan, whence the family name of Sherwajee, modified into Shervashiji, but claiming descent from the ancient kings of Iran. Having in the year 1625 lent considerable aid to the Turks in their interminable contest with the Persians for the mastery of Georgia, he was by them confirmed in the government of Abkhasia ; his residence was at Soukhoun, whence for a while his descendants, still known among the Turks by the by-name of 'Kizil-Bash,' synonymous with 'Persian,' ruled the entire province. But when somewhat later Soukhoun became the abode of an Ottoman Pasha, the Shervashijis transferred their quarters to So'ouk-Soo, which henceforth became in a manner the capital of Abkhasia.

The treaty of Adrianople, in 1829, handed over the Western Caucasian coast to Russian rule ; and the ruling Shervashiji (Hamood Beg), then in the prime of life, showed himself a devoted worshipper of the rising,—if not sun,—Aurora Borealis of Petersburg. Quitting his ancestral religion and name, he was baptized into Russian Christianity under the title of Michael Beg, received a high rank in the Russian army, and, head and hand, did the work of his new masters.

For all the long years that the Circassian struggle lasted, through the months wasted by Omar Pasha in Mingrelia, and during all the squandered and lost opportunity—squandered in 1855, lost in 1856—of restoring and of securing the freedom of the Caucasus, perhaps of all Central Asia, from the yoke to which more and more necks must daily bow, Michael Shervashiji was by turns the main implement of Russian diplomacy in disuniting Western Caucasus from the common cause, and the military executioner to whom was entrusted the subdual, and even extermination, of his more patriotic neighbours. With the short-sighted acuteness common among Easterns he saw only his own present advantage, and took no heed that while helping to destroy his petty though hereditary rivals he was, in the Russian point of view, cutting away the last props of his own rule. Meanwhile his every request was granted, every privilege confirmed. Russian garrisons were indeed at Soukhoun-Kalé, at Gagri, at other stations of the coast; but inland Michael Shervashiji was sole lord and master, and not even a Russian officer could venture a 'werst' up the interior without his permission and escort.

All this was very well for a time; Shamyl was still unconquered, and Michael Shervashiji was too valuable an ally for the Russians not to be humoured—Shakespeare might have said 'fooled'—to the top of his bent, even at some temporary sacrifice of Russian uniformization and monopoly. But at last the circle of hunters narrowed round the mountain deer at bay in the heights of Gunib, and eyes less keen than Michael's could foresee near at hand the moment when the last independence of the Caucasus would have ceased to be. *Tua res agitur paries cum proximus ardet*, can be thought in Abkhasian no less than expressed in Latin; and Michael

grew uneasy at the prospect of a boundless horizon of Russian friends. His health suddenly but opportunely failed, a change of air,—of water, Eastern M.D.'s would say,—became necessary; a journey to Europe was recommended; a passport was taken, rather than granted; and the great Shervashiji, like many other princes, went to try the waters.

That the said waters should in a few months have restored his health was quite natural; it was, however, somewhat singular that they should at the same time have had an Osmanizing effect on his own constitution. Some say they were the waters of the Bosphorus that acted on him thus; others attribute it to a reaction produced by the waters of the Volga, which, in a visit to Moscow, he drank near their source about this very time. Certainly on his return strange and anti-Muscovite symptoms appeared. His new residence at So'ouk-Soo, the ancestral seat of his independence, rose on a Turkish model; his manners, his speech, grew less Russian. It was noticed, too, that on entering church he no longer uncovered his head, a decided hint, said the Russians, that church and mosque were for him on much the same footing. Perhaps the Russians were not far wrong.

Then came 1864, the great Circassian emigration—i.e. the expulsion of well nigh a million of starving and plundered wretches from their country, for the crime of having defended that country against strangers—was accomplished; in Eastern phrase, the Abkhasian 'back was cut,' and now came their turn to receive the recompense of their fidelity to Russia and their infidelity to their native Caucasus.' The first and main tool of Tiflis had been Michael Shervashiji; he was accordingly the first to receive his stipend.

Too late aware what that stipend was likely to be,

he had retired into an out-of-the-way country residence some hours to the interior, behind Otchemchiri. Here, in November, 1864, the Russian 'pay-day' found him, in the shape of a detachment of soldiers sent by his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Michael to invite and escort him to the viceregal presence at Tiflis. Whether thinking that resistance would only make matters worse, or reckoning on the deceptive chances of what is called 'an appeal to generosity,' the Beg at once gave himself up to the troops. By them he was forthwith conducted, not to Tiflis, but to the coast, where lay the ship appointed to convey him to Kertch, whence began his destined journey to Russia and Siberia. A traitor, he met a traitor's recompense, and that, as was most fitting, at the hands of those in whose behalf his life had been for thirty-five years one prolonged treason to his country. Yet that country wept him at his departure—he was their born prince, after all, and no stranger—and they wept him still more when the news of his death—the ready consequence of exile at an advanced age into the uncongenial Siberian climate and Siberian treatment, but by popular rumour attributed to Russian poison—reached them in the spring of 1866. His corpse was brought back to his native mountains, and he was buried amid the tears and wailings of his Abkhasian subjects.

They had, indeed, already other cause for their wailings. Hardly had their last prince ceased to live, than measures were taken by the viceregal Government for the nominal demarcation, the real confiscation, of the lands of the Abkhasian nobility; while the peasants, for their part, found the little finger of Russian incorporation heavier than all the loins of all the Sher-vashijis. Russian custom-houses formed a cordon along the coast; Russian Cossacks and Natchalnicks were

posted everywhere up the country; the whole province was placed under Russian law and military administration; Abkhasian rights, Abkhasian customs and precedents were henceforth abolished. More still, their religion, the great supplement of nationality in the East—because in its Eastern form it embodies whatever makes a nation, its political and social, its public and private being—was now menaced. Russian chronologists discovered that the Abkhasians had once been Christians, whence the Tiflis Government drew the self-evident conclusion that they had no right to be at present Mahometans. An orthodox bishop or archbishop, I forget which, of Abkhasia, appeared on the scene, and the work, or rather the attempt at proselytism was diligently pushed forward by enticement and intimidation under hierarchical auspices. Lastly, a census of the population,—a process which ever since David numbered the children of Israel and brought on them the plague in consequence, has been in ill-odour in the East,—was ordered.

Of the Shervashiji family many remained. Michael's own brother, Alexander, still resided, though without authority, at So'ouk-Soo; George, Michael's eldest son, now a Russian officer, and the Grand Duke's aide-de-camp, had returned from Petersburg, where no amount of champagne and cards had been spared to make him a genuine Russian; epaulettes and aigrettes would, it was to be hoped, retain him such. But bred in the bone will not out of the flesh, and he was still a Shervashiji, nor had he forgotten the rights of heir-apparent. Another and a powerful branch of the same family, the relatives of Said Beg Shervashiji of Kelasoor, a Mahometan, and who had died poisoned, it was said, by his Christian kinsman and rival, Michael, were also in the country, and seemed inclined to forget family quarrels in the

common cause. Besides these were two other 'houses' of special note, the Marshians and the Ma'ans. The former had, like the Shervashijis, been in general subservient to Russia—some had even apostatized from Islam; but their chief, Shereem Beg a Mahometan, had married Michael Shervashiji's sister, and state marriages in the East are productive of other results than mere non-interventions and children. The other family, the Ma'ans, staunch Islam, had for some time previous broken off Russian connection: one of them, Mustapha Agha, had even taken service in the Ottoman army. Their head, Hasan Ma'an, had quitted his Abkhasian abode at Bambora, half way between Soukhoun and So'ouk-Soo, for the Turkish territory of Trebizond, where he lived within call, but without grasp.

Discontent was general and leaders were not wanting; yet just and judicious measures on the part of the Russians might have smoothed all down; but their Nemesis and that of Abkhasia had decreed that such measures should not be taken—the exact reverse.

In the month of July, 1866, a commission headed by the civilian Cheripoff had come from Tiflis to complete the survey and estimate of the lands, those of the Shervashijis in particular. This commission had taken up its head-quarters at So'ouk-Soo along with the local military Governor, Ismailoff, and a body of Cossacks about two hundred strong. Some of these last were stationed at the coast village of Gouda'outa, a few miles distant. To So'ouk-Soo now flocked all the discontented chiefs, and of course their followers; for no Abkhasian noble can stir a foot out of doors without a 'tail' of at least thirty, each with his long slender-stocked gun, his goat-hair cloak, his pointed head-dress, and, for the rest, a knife at his girdle, and more tears than cloth in his tight grey trousers and large cartridge-breasted coat.

Some mezzotints in *Hughes' Albanian Travels*, old edition, two volumes quarto, where Suliotes, Albanians, and the like are to be seen clambering over rocks, gun on shoulder, in the evident intention of shooting somebody, give a tolerable idea of these fellows, only they are more ragged than the heroes of the said mezzotints, also less ferocious. The commission lodged in the houses about the Meidan; the Abkhasians—for it was summer—camped on the Meidan itself, filling it with guns and gutturals.

Much parleying took place. The Abkhasians were highly excited—why, we have already seen; the Russians, not yet aware with whom they had to deal, were insolent and overbearing. The fire of contest was, unavowedly but certainly, fanned by many of the Abkhasian chiefs, not unwilling to venture all where they saw that if they ventured nothing they must lose all. Alexander Shervashiji was there in his own house on the Meidan; his nephew George had arrived from Tifis: the Russian decorations on his breast lay over a heart no less anti-Russian than his uncle's and his father's—so at least said the Russians: perhaps it suited them to incriminate the last influential representatives of the Shervashijifamily. There too were many of the Marshians: was Shereem Beg amongst them? Some said, some denied. 'Se non è vero è ben trovato,' was the Russian conclusion. But more active than any, more avowedly at the head of what now daily approached nearer to revolt, were the two Ma'an brothers, Mustapha and Temshook—the former lately returned from Turkey—both men of some talent and of much daring.

Meanwhile news of all this was brought to Colonel Cognard, the Russian Governor-General of Abkhasia, and then resident at Soukhoun-Kalé. A violent, imperious man, full of contempt for all 'natives,' and

like many of foreign origin, more Russian than the Russians themselves, he imagined that his presence at So'ouk-Soo would at once suffice to quell the rising storm and awe the discontented into submission. Accordingly, on the first week of August, he arrived on the scene, and lodged in the great house of Alexander Shervashiji—whither, in consequence, the whole attention of either party, Russian and Abkhasian, was now directed.

Throughout the whole of this affair, it is curious to observe how the Russians, men of no great sensibility themselves, ignored the sensibilities of others, and seemed to think that whatever the injury, whatever the wrong, inflicted by a Russian Government, it ought to arouse in its victims no other feeling than resignation at most. Here in Abkhasia the hereditary ruler of the country had, after life-long services, in time of profound tranquillity, with nothing proved or even distinctly charged against him, been suddenly dragged into exile and premature death; his family, those of all the Abkhasian nobility, had been deprived of their rights, and threatened with the deprivation of their property; ancestral customs, law, religion, national existence,—for even Abkhasians lay claim to all these,—had been brought to the verge of Russian absorption into not-being; and all the while Cognard with his friends could not imagine the existence of any Abkhasian discontent that would not at once be appeased, be changed into enthusiastic, into Pan-slavistic loyalty, by the appearance of that '*deus ex machina*,' a Russian Governor-General. *Vide Warsaw passim.*

Nemesis willed it otherwise. Cognard's demeanour was brutal, his every word an insult. The nobles presented their griefs; he refused to recognize them as nobles. The peasants clamoured; he informed

them that they were not Abkhasians but Russians. In vain Alexander Shervashiji and the Marshians, sensible and moderate men the most, expostulated and represented that the moment was not one for additional irritation; Cognard was deaf to expostulation and advice; his fate was on him. It did not delay. On the 8th of August a deputation composed of the principal Abkhasian nobility laid before him a sort of Oriental ultimatum in the form of an address; the Russian Governor-General answered it by kicking address and nobles out of doors. It was noon: a cry of vengeance and slaughter arose from the armed multitude on the Meidan.

The assault began on the Cossacks stationed about the house; they were no less unprepared than their masters, and could offer but little resistance. Already the first shots had been fired and blood had flowed when Cognard sent out George Shervashiji to appease those who should by right have been his subjects—whose rebellion was, in fact, for his own father's sake. That he never returned is certain. By his own account, which was confirmed on most hands, he did his best to quiet the insurgents, but unsuccessfully. They forced him aside, said he, and detained him at a distance while the outbreak went on. The Russians ascribed to him direct participation in what followed; the reasons for such imputation are palpable, the fact itself improbable.

In a few minutes the Cossacks before the gate were overpowered and slaughtered; the Abkhasians burst into the house. Its owner, Alexander Shervashiji, met them on the inner threshold, and implored them to respect the sanctity of their chief's hearth. But that moment had gone by, and the old man was laid hold of by his countrymen and led away—respectfully

indeed, but in a manner to preclude resistance—while the massacre begun without doors continued within. Whatever was Russian perished: the luckless Commissioner from Tiflis first; Cognard's aide-de-camp and his immediate suite were cut down; but the main search of the insurgents was after Cognard himself. A Russian picture, largely copied and circulated, represents him seated composedly in his chair, unblenched in feature, unmoved in limb, confronting his assailants. Pity that so artistic a group should have existed only in the artist's own imagination. The Colonel had not, indeed, made good his retreat, but he had done his best thereto by creeping up the large fireplace, of Abkhasian fashion, in the principal room. Unfortunately for him his boots protruded downwards into the open space; and by these the insurgents seized him, dragged him out to the mid apartment, and there despatched him. His colleague, Ismailoff, had a worse fate. Specially obnoxious to the inhabitants of So'ouk-Soo for the impudence of his profligacy, he was first mutilated and then hewn piecemeal, limb by limb. It is said that the dogs were already eating morsels of his flesh before life had left his body. Such atrocities are not uncommon in the East where female honour is concerned, rare else. At So'ouk-Soo, Ismailoff was the only instance.

All was now in the hands of the insurgents, who sacked and burnt the houses of Russian tenants, killing all they found. Only twenty Cossacks escaped, and these owed their lives to the humane exertions of the wife of Alexander Shervashiji, who gave them refuge in her own apartments, and kept them there safe till the massacre was over. A few Georgians and Mingrelians, a Pole too, though wearing the Russian uniform, were also spared. 'You are not Russians, our quarrel is

not with you,' said the Abkhasians, as they took the men's arms, and sent them off uninjured to Soukhoun.

On the same afternoon the insurgents attacked the nearest Russian post, that of the Cossacks stationed on coast-guard at Gouda'outa. Here, too, the assailants were successful, the Russians were killed to a man, and their abode was burnt. The Nemesis of Abkhasia had completed another stage of her work.

'To Soukhoun' was now the cry; and the whole mass of armed men, now about three thousand in number, were in movement southwards along the coast, through thickets and by-paths, to the Russian stronghold. Next morning, from two to three hundred had already crossed the Gumista, a broad mountain torrent north of Soukhoun, and were before, or rather behind the town.

A small crescent of low one-storied houses, mostly wood, Soukhoun-Kalé lies at the bottom of a deep bay with a southerly aspect. At its western extremity is the Old Fort, ascribed to the Genovese, but more probably of Turkish date, whence Soukhoun derives the adjunct of 'Kela'at,' or 'Castle' (Kalé is erroneous, but we will retain it for custom's sake), a square building, with thick walls of rough masonry and a few flanking bastions; within is room for a mustered regiment or more. From the town crescent some straight lines, indications of roads, run perpendicularly back across the plashy ground for about a quarter of a mile to the mountains; along these lines are ranged other small wooden houses, mostly tenanted by Russian officers. The garrison-camp, situated on the most unhealthy site of this unhealthy marsh, lies east. Behind is a table-land, whereon in August last there still stood the barracks of a Russian outpost, a hospital, a public vapour-bath, and a few houses.

The coast strip is low and swampy, a nest of more fevers than there are men to catch them; the mountains behind, thickly wooded and fern-clad between the trees, are fairly healthy.

At the moment of the first Abkhasian onset, the 9th of August, three Russian vessels—a transport, a corvette, and a schooner, all three belonging to the long-shore fleet of Nicolaieff—were lying in the harbour. But the number of men in the camp was small, falling under a thousand, and of these not above one-half were fit for duty.

Had the Abkhasians been able at once to bring their whole force to bear on Soukhoum-Kalé, town and fort would probably have alike fallen into their hands. At the first approach of the enemy, the Russian garrison had abandoned the plateau and all the upper part of the town, confining themselves to the defensive in the lines along the shore, where they were in a measure covered by the fire of the ships, and in the Fort itself. Meanwhile all the ‘mixed multitude’ of Soukhoum—small Greek and Armenian shop-keepers, Mingrelian and Georgian camp-followers, a few Jews and the like—had fled for refuge, some into the Fort, some on board the vessels in the harbour. But their best auxiliary on this occasion was a violent rain-storm, which at this very moment burst over the mountains, and in a few hours so swelled the Gumista torrent that the main body of Abkhasians mustered behind it were for the whole of the ensuing day unable to cross over to the help of their comrades, the assailants of Soukhoum.

These last had already occupied the plateau, burnt whatever was on it, and, descending into the plain, plundered and set fire to the dwellings of several Russian officers close below. They then advanced some way down the central street, ostentatiously called the

'Boulevard' in honour of some little trees planted along it. But here they were checked by the fire of the Russian vessels, and by the few troops whom their officers could persuade to remain without the fort in the lower part of the town.

Two days, two anxious days, matters remained on this footing. But news had been despatched to Poti, and on the third morning arrived a battalion from that place, just as the main body of the Abkhasians, headed by the two sons of Hasan Ma'an, Mustapha and Temshook, crossed the now diminished Gumista and entered Soukhoun.

Fighting now began in good earnest. The numbers on either side were pretty fairly matched, but the Abkhasians, though inferior in arms, were superior in courage; and it required all the exertions of a Polish colonel and of two Greek officers to keep the Russian soldiers from even then abandoning the open ground. However, next morning brought the Russians fresh reinforcements; and being by this time fully double the force of their ill-armed, undisciplined enemy, they ventured on becoming assailants in their turn. By the end of the fifth day the insurgents had dispersed amid the woods. The Russian loss at Soukhoun-Kalé was reckoned at sixty or seventy men, that of the Abkhasians at somewhat less; but as they carried their dead and wounded away with them, the exact number has never been known. During the short period of their armed presence at Soukhoun they had killed no one except in fair fight, burnt or plundered no houses except Russian, committed no outrage, injured no neutral. Only the Botanical Garden, a pretty copse of exotic trees, the creation of Prince Woronzoff, and on this occasion the scene of some hard fighting, was much wasted, and a Polish chapel was burnt. Public rumour ascribed both

these acts of needless destruction, the first probably, the latter certainly, to the Russian soldiery themselves.

The rest of the story is soon told. Accompanied by a large body of troops, the Russian Governor-General of the Western Caucasus went to So'ouk-Soo. He met with no resistance. Cognard and his fellow-victims were buried—we have seen their graves—and the house of Alexander Shervashiji, that in which Cognard had perished, with the palace of the Prince Michael, was gutted and burnt by a late act of Russian vindictiveness. The Nemesis of Abkhasia added these further trophies to her triumph at So'ouk-Soo.

Thus it was in November last. A few more months have passed, and that triumph is already complete. After entire submission, and granted pardon, the remnant of the old Abkhasian nation—first their chiefs and then the people—have at last, in time of full peace and quiet, been driven from the mountains and coast where Greek, Roman, Persian, and Turkish domination had left them unmolested for more than two thousand years, to seek under the more tolerant rule of the Ottoman Sultan a freedom which Russia often claims without her own limits, always denies within them. The Meidan of So'ouk-Soo is now empty. Russians and Abkhasians, Shervashijis and Cossacks, native and foreigner, have alike disappeared, and nothing remains but the fast crumbling memorials of a sad history of national folly rewarded by oppression, oppression by violence, violence by desolation.