

We tarried a while in the roadstead of Sukhum-Kale; a couple of boats rowed by sinewy Abkhazians took off a little cargo; a boatman came on board and talked with a young woman on the middle deck; she burst into continuous weeping, and all efforts to console her were vain. Her husband had been shot in a riot. She was one of thousands and thousands of Russian women who wept in those days. Her wailing sounded desperate and hopeless above the raging of the storm till the end of the voyage.

Beyond Poti the violence of the storm increased, the sky was blue-black, and the rain pelted on the deck and the saloon windows, but we had only three hours more. At midnight the vessel entered the harbour of Batum. What a dismal landing! Pouring rain, pitchy darkness unbroken by lights, dead silence, no porters, no droskies, and, worst of all, the news that railway traffic had been stopped three days before. In fact, a great strike was in progress, involving all departments of labour and trade.

However, under cover of the darkness, a couple of bold dock-labourers ventured, in consideration of high pay, to take charge of our luggage and guide us to the nearest hotel, a regular den of thieves, full of rogues and vagabonds. If they were detected as strike-breakers, they would be mercilessly shot down, our porters assured us, and we subsequently found that their statement was not exaggerated.

I was on the way to Teheran. But I might well be asked why on earth I chose just now the route through the Caucasus, the most restless corner of the Russian Empire. Well, when I left Constantinople on October 25, furnished with two special passports from the Russian Ambassador Zinovieff, formerly Minister in Stockholm, comparative quiet prevailed in Russia, and at least the railways were being worked. My goal was Tibet, and I had decided to travel overland to India. I had a choice of three routes to the capital of Persia: (1) Batum-Tiflis-Baku-Resht-Teheran; (2) Batum-Tiflis-Erivan-Nakichevan - Tabriz - Teheran; (3) Trebizond - Erzerum - Bayazid-Khoi-Tabriz, and Teheran. I knew the first of old, and therefore wished to avoid it. The road from