

CHAPTER II

ANARCHY ON THE COLCHIS COAST

IN pouring rain and pitchy darkness we landed in the middle of the night at Poti. Here, at any rate, we found carriages. My fellow-travellers drove into the town, which is a mile and a quarter from the pier, but I had to get out my heavy baggage, weighing 770 lbs., and see it under cover in a warehouse before I could follow them. The rain pelted against the hood and splashed in the mud; we passed safely the two bridges over the Rion, but when we drove into the first street my carriage was stopped by Cossacks, who looked at me suspiciously, and would not let me proceed till after a rigorous identification according to the regulations. All the hotels were overflowing with visitors who were waiting for an opportunity to take train for Tiflis, and it was not till nearly morning that we found a miserable room in the "Yevropeiskiya Nomer," a fourth-class hotel, which should rather be called "The Asiatic Apartments." Kept by Georgian speculators, it is surrounded on all sides by water, and a small bridge communicates with the street, an ordinary country road, with a cobblestone here and there. Fortunately, the streets are somewhat raised above the adjoining ground, and provided with gutters, so that the water runs off. But the houses on either side stand in marshes and pools, and the gardens, in particular, stand under water. If one did not know it, one would suspect that this town must be a fever haunt. In summer rain is less frequent; but the air is then heavy with moisture, mist, and warm miasma.

Our hotel, indeed, was an island, and cows in the