

Trans-Caucasian railways, which drew the trade in other directions and inaugurated a new period of development for Resht on the south coast of the Caspian Sea.

It is not long ago that Tabriz contained half a million of inhabitants. It was a serious blow to the town when it was almost razed to the ground in 1721 by an earthquake which cost 20,000 human lives. The town then stood nearer to the shore of Lake Urmia, and it was rebuilt on its present site, but it never recovered from the misfortune. It had, indeed, shortly before the opening of the Suez Canal, 350,000 inhabitants; but it suffered immense loss through the new sea route, which drew to itself the trade of all the southern half of Persia. For previously it was through Tabriz that all Persian commerce sought an outlet, and from this centre trade-routes radiated to Teheran and Meshed, Ispahan, and southern Persia. Now it is really only the market for the province, and its domain extends little beyond Urmia and Maraga, and in some small degree to Teheran.

The English Consul, Mr. Stevens, who has lived in Tabriz since the year 1875, informed me that thirty years ago, in his capacity as agent for five English commercial houses, he found customers for 8000 bales of goods as against 1000 at the present time. Then there were several large firms, especially Greek and Armenian, which have now entirely disappeared; and it was the Suez Canal and the Trans-Caucasian railway which stripped its laurels from the old famous trade-route Trebizond to Tabriz. Mr. Stevens estimated the present population at about 200,000, of whom the great majority are Tatars, while the residue is made up of 5000 or 6000 Armenians, a few Persians, Kurds, Chaldeans, Europeans, and half-a-dozen Jews. Herr A. F. Stahl states the number of the inhabitants to be nearer 300,000.

The Belgian customs organization was introduced into Persia in the year 1900; and some years previously M. Naus, with two assistants, had come hither to study the conditions. At that time the greatest disorder prevailed everywhere. The right to control and levy customs was farmed out or sold by auction to governors and other notables,