Notes of a Journey in Georgia

By Marjory Wardrop written in 1895 about her 1st trip to Georgia

One morning, about the middle of December 1894, after a voyage of thirteen days from Marseilles, I awoke to find our steamer lying outside the port of Batum. The day had just dawned, and the town was veiled in a chilling mist, but from time to time a glimpse might be caught of the high mountains beyond. It was my first glimpse of the land which I had so often pictured to myself, in visions of night as well as in my waking dreams. Since first my interest had been aroused in the Ancient Kingdom of Georgia, in its beautiful scenery, in its brave and handsome inhabitants, in its rich literature and, above all, in its sad yet glorious history, I had longed for the day when I should myself visit those places of which I had read and thought, when I should perhaps meet those poets in whose works I had found so much delight. Georgia was to me fairyland, and here I was [pg 2] on the very point of entering its enchanting bounds.

We stayed only one night in Batum, a town growing every year in commercial importance, but presenting few features of interest to the tourist. Here, however, we first experienced that hospitality for which the Georgians are so famed, and met some charming people who welcomed us to their country with warmth. Next morning we left by the daily train for Tiflis. Skirting the Black Sea for some miles, we reached Chakva, where tea plantations have been lately formed; at the station ~~we were~~ I was surprised to see about a dozen pig-tailed Chinamen, in their native costumes, mingling in the crowd of picturesque Gurians, who had come to see the train pass through. [~~There are many tea plantations in the Caucuses, and the tea grown is of a fine, delicate flavour~~.]

The journey from Batum to Tiflis is performed very slowly, but this is a matter for congratulations rather than regret to the tourist, as one has an opportunity of seeing the beautiful scenery which gradually unfolds itself. The clouds [pg 3] had cleared away, and before our eyes was spread the fairest picture of earth's beauty that one could well imagine. Hill after hill, commanded by ancient fortresses and towers, around whose ivy

clad, ruined walls clings many a legend of bygone days; limpid streams, whose waters have oft been dyed crimson by the blood of heroes; shadowy forests, into whose devi-haunted depths the timorous peasant dare not venture, and, far to the North, the frosty Caucasus, with its eternal snow-clad peaks, which seem to reach to heaven, all these we had leisure to look upon as we passed along. Nature seemed to have forgotten that it was winter, for the vegetation was luxuriant. All the seasons were united in making the scene fair: spring had spread a carpet of purple violets, which the rich green of summer ~~trees~~ leaves still decked the trees, striving to vie with autumn's bright hued, and, far away, winter looked down from the frosty mountain tops, fearing to play havoc in so lovely a land.

About half past nine in the evening we reached Mtzkhet, the ancient [pg 4] royal capital where S. Nino preached Christianity in the IVth century, and where she converted King Mirian and all Georgia to that faith, for which the Iberian race has fought so bravely. Here we were met by some noble Georgians , who had come to welcome us to their capital and escort us to Tiflis, among them the great poet, Prince Ilia Chavchavadze, his wife and sister, and Catharine Gabashvili, a well known authoress. The distance from Mtzkhet to Tiflis was soon passed, and about half past ten o'clock we alighted, far from fatigued, only regretting that the delightful journey was at an end.

Tiflis, in which we spent three weeks is a charming city, containing as it does the characteristics of both East and West. Englishmen would be astonished at the luxury and elegance of the interiors of the best Georgian houses, and would be ~~astonished~~ surprised to visit the shops on the Golovinskii Prospekt, where one finds a little Regent Street. On the other hand, spend an hour in the Oriental bazaars and you will see [pg 5] see swarthy Persians and wily sons of Haik sitting crosslegged behind their wares, clamouring on the passers by.

The best views of Tiflis are to be obtained from St. David's Monastery, on Mt'hatsminda (Holy Mount), and from the Botanical Garden. The history of the latter is curious: the Georgians named it Batonis Baghi, i.e. the lord's garden, for it belonged to their King; when the Russians came, not understanding the Georgian language, they

called it Botanicheskii Sad (Botanical garden) and now it has really become a botanical garden. At sunset one gets a magnificent view of the plain of Kart'hli, with its capital lying in the bosom of her rocky hills. The roofs, many of them flat, are painted sea green, terra cotta and blue in many shades, and present a most picturesque appearance; commanded by the fortress, "the muddy and peaceful Kura" flows through the town, while over all hills, town, plain -- there is a soft misty rose colour which gives [pg 6] an air of enchantment to the scene.

On Tiflis, there are many objects of interest and some fine old churches. The Cathedral of Sion, dating from 445 is the largest of these [and is built in the same style as all the other churches in Georgia] In front of the altar is preserved the cross of St. Nino, formed of two vine-stems bound together by a lock of the saint's hair; this cross has always been the most sacred relic in Georgia.

The Metekh Chapel, in the fortress, also dates from the Vth century; in it lies buried St. Shushanik, a princess who suffered martyrdom.

Mushtaid is a fine garden on the banks of the Kura, at the end of Michael Street. Here the Caucasian Exhibition was held in 1889, and the old buildings are now turned into a silk-growing and honey-making school. With a well furnished museum [of everything relating to the growth of silk].

There are several theatres in Tiflis, and its inhabitants, like all Georgians, are pleasure loving and gay. The Georgian theatre [pg 7] is kept well provided with plays from native authors, and possesses some talented actors and actresses.

There are many literary men, and what is, in the East, remarkable, literary women. From the earliest times Georgian women have had the greatest influence on the race, owing possibly to the early adoption of Christianity, While the men were engaged in fighting the wars against Islam, in which the country has so often been plunged, the women were at home teaching their children to read and write, arts often times unknown to the sterner sex. Much of the literature has been preserved from oblivion by the women, who studied their ancient classics, learning many of them by heart; even now, in the country, many a maid and matron beguiles the winter evenings in repeating by heart the

whole of the beautiful epic poem "The Man in the Panther's Skin" by Shota Rust'haveli. It consists of over 6000 lines, and is a noble poem of love and adventure, full of passages of wonderful beauty, the more astonishing when [pg 8] we remember how early it was written [long] before Dante was born. The poet himself speaks of the equality of the sexes in many places e.g. "The lion cubs are equal be they male or female," a passage often quoted. Georgian women of today keep up the ancient traditions: in Tiflis we find lady editors of papers, and contributors too. Indeed it seemed to me that the gentler sex have more energy than their lords.

But it is not alone in the arts of peace that Georgian women have excelled. It was here that the Amazons fought their battles, and in modern times there are many tales of warlike, heroic deeds performed by dedicatly nurtured princesses. The great Queen T'hamara an Ket'hevan used to lead their armies themselves, clad in armour, against the Persians. [pg 9]

After spending three delightful weeks in Tiflis we decided to go to Kutais, the capital of Imeret'hi, a province lying to the West of Kart'hli. In Tiflis we had heard much of the beauty of this region and longed to see it for ourselves. Travelling back, by the same route that we had followed when we came, as far as Rion, we changed carriages, and in about twenty minutes were in Kutais. On our arrival at the station we were met by a large assembly, for our kind friends in Tiflis had insisted upon informing the town of our arrival. The Georgians love guests, and hospitality is one of the first virtues in their estimation. Besides their natural love of strangers, they took a special interest in us, for we had learnt their language and had come from England to see them. The friendly and enthusiastic welcome we received everywhere more than compensated for the trying hours spent over the difficulties of their language, and the eccentricities of the Georgian verb.

At Kutais they prepared a banquet in our honour, and as a Georgian banquet is (pg 10] somewhat different from a Western one, I shall describe this one. We were taken in carriages, sent by the Municipality, to a house on the hill, large enough to accommodate the 150 guests who had assembled to meet us. [These guests introduced themselves by

coming up, shaking hands and telling their family name.] After the ceremony of introduction concluded, we adjourned to the banqueting hall. The tables were arranged across and along the room, and at the chief table, in the middle, we sat with the Marshal of the Nobility, the Mayor of the town, and other notables with their wives. When the dinner was well commenced a toastmaster (tolumbash) was chosen, and he proposed our healths -- one at a time -- in eloquent speeches. Then all present rose to their feet and emptied their glasses, vehicle, in the next room, with an accompaniment of native instruments, singers chanted the national toast "mraval jamier" (many years) and "Ghmertma inebos" (God grant you long life) and the reply "madlobeli var" (I thank you). There are many melodies, at least one hundred and fifty, to which this toast [pg 11] is sung, some of them being of great antiquity. The healths of all present, and of our relatives and friends in England were successively drunk, and it will be readily understood that this would be a trying ordeal to one unaccustomed to drink much wine. However the Georgian is a courteous host and a stranger may do as he pleases. Many Georgian songs were sung by those present -- one lady singing a beautiful cradle song in a charming manner.

After two or three hours the hall was cleared for the national dance, *lecuri*. All sat in a circle clapping the hands in time with the instruments, while the dancers performed. First little Tamara, a beautiful dark eyed child of about six, danced with her mother, a lovely Georgian princess clad in rich silks. Then a man, dressed in Circassian costume, gracefully approached a lady and entreated her with appropriate gestures to join him in the dance. After a little pressing she consended and then [pg 12] began a series of the most elegant motions, for they were among the finest dancers in the country. She, clad in white, with easy grace, one hand arched over the head, the other by her side, gliding [with] almost imperceptibly, was followed by the pursuer, sometimes standing still while he moved round her, and at other times sweeping down the hall to escape, as it seemed, the earnestness of the entreating [lover] suitor. Sometimes she turned her face, and he, approaching nearer, sought to reach her, but still she retreated. Surely the *lecuri* contains all the poetry of motion, and makes one realize that dancing is an art, very different from

the awkward whirling vagaries of a ballroom waltz. When one couple was fatigued another took its place, the company all the time clapping their hands. (A banquet of this kind is usually kept up until very late -- it often being morning before the guests separate). [pg 13]. In Imeret'hi we are in the land of romance. Hither, to Kutais, the ancient Kyta in Colchis, had Jason come to seek the Golden Fleece; in these fair groves by Rion's pure stream, the ancient Phasis, he had found the long sought for treasure and had whispered tales of love in the willing ears of the beautiful sorceress Medea. On yon rock was Prometheus chained by the cruel edict of love, while "heaven's winged hound" tore up his heart. Many an old world legend lingers in the memory of the peasants, and one of their favourite stories is that of Amirani, which is no other than the classic tale of Prometheus.

Medea and Jason are still used as proper names among them and we can meet Telemachus, Juno and even Venus among the handsome inhabitants of this interesting country.

Kutais, even without its associations, is one of the most interesting towns in the Caucasus. Its position could not be more picturesque. [pg 14]. It lies embosomed in the valley of the Rion, with high mountains on all sides, the town commanded by the ancient ruins of Bagrat's palace, while, in the distance, nestling among wooded hills, the fair white monastery of Gelat'hi can be seen. It has a climate delightfully mild in winter and cool in summer.

We lost no time in paying a visit to Gelat'hi. Next morning a carriage, with four horses harnessed abreast, bore us to the monastery, founded by King David the Renewer at the end of the XI century. The road, a very rough and rocky one, runs along the banks of the Rion, and yields many delightful views. Gradually ascending a steep hill we at last reach the monastery itself. Of Gelat'his many Georgian poets write enthusiastically, and it is indeed a fair spot, adorned with emerald lawns and sweet scented flowers. [pg 15)]

There is an old building of a still earlier date, and in it is buried King David, a monarch of gigantic stature and strength, who did much for his country in erecting new and in restoring ancient monuments. There is a tradition to the effect that he himself

carried one of the stones to found the monastery. It is still pointed out in the wall and is a huge slab.

On his tomb are inscribed the words: “Seven Kings once stayed with me as guests; Turks, Persians, Arabians have I driven forth from my Kingdom.” His granddaughter was the glorious Queen T’hamara, whose reign was the golden period of Georgian history and literature, and some suppose that she also is buried here. There are many precious and ancient relics, among them being a Greek MS of the VI century; but alas! the church has been spoiled of many by the Russians who have carried them off to St. Petersburg. Among those which remain is the Khakhuli portrait of the Virgin, to which is attached the following legend: When St. Andrew was leaving Palestine for the [pg 16]. Caucasus, after the death of Christ, Mary pressed a cloth to her face and this retained the impression of her features. This she gave to the Holy Apostle. He arrived in Georgia just at the time when the Queen’s son had died, and, touching the child with the cloth, he immediately was restored to life. Many were converted to Christianity, but the pagan priests disputed the power of St. Andrew, and invited him to a trial of strength. A tent was erected in the plain, the holy image was placed on one side while the other was devoted to the native idols. In the morning the idols were found overturned, while the picture of the Virgin was still as it had been left. This miracle was the means of converting the people, and they built a chapel on the spot where it had happened. There the image remained until the chapel was destroyed by the Mussulmans, when it was taken away and hidden. The miraculous image was afterwards placed in the monastery of Gelat’hi and there it has since remained. The case in which it is preserved is richly adorned with [pg 17] precious stones. Whether the above legend be true or not, the image is of undoubted antiquity and is mentioned by some of the earliest writers. The church itself is in the form of a Byzantine cross, and in the dome are represented in finely preserved mosaic the Virgin and Child, with the angels Michael and Gabriel. It was a gift from Alexis Acomnenus to King David III, the Renewer. One of the ancient gates of Werbend is preserved here, bearing an inscription telling that it was made in 1063. The other gate is said to have been used in covering the roof of the church.

Although it was the beginning of January, we lunched in the open air, beneath an arbour of vine leaves, and there was not a cloud on the sky. Indeed, during the two months that we were in the country, although it was the depth of winter, the climate was like that of Italy in May.

About three miles from Gelat'hi is situated the monastery of Motsamet'hi (place of the martyrs) founded in the XI century by Bagrati the Great. [pg 18] The monastery communicates with the outer world by a bridge protected by a tower. The river winds round the rock upon which Motsamet'hi stands, forming a peninsula. The rock, clad with ivy and trees, descends sheer to the fast flowing stream, the Tsqal Tsit'heli (Red River, so called from the rent tint of the earth's formation) and a picture more wils? and solitary it would be difficult to imagine. Here lie buried St David and St Constantine, two Georgian martyrs. Tradition tells that they were drowned in this stream and that it was from their blood that it receives its crimson hue. They prayed at their death that their bodies might remain uncorrupted and possess healing powers, and there are many tales of the miracles which have been performed by touching them.

It is unfortunate that in the churches the service must be in Russian, or at least half in Russian, and much regret is expressed in Kutais because the next bishop will probably be a Russian. The present Bishop of Imeret'hi Gabriel is now an old white haired man, but his influence, so powerful [pg 19] for good in his country, can never die. Two volumes of his sermons, remarkable alike for the purity and elegance of language and for the simplicity and mobility of thought, have been published at Tiflis, and have already passed through many editions. The late Rev. S.C. Malan translated some of these sermons into English.

I shall never forget our visit to Bishop Gabriel. He was seated in his study -- a touching picture of the evening of a well spent life. His hair was snowy white and his eye had lost its youthful fire, but there was on his fine features an expression of calm content, which betokened the close of a life spent in leading others to seek goodness and pursue it. He took us out to his balcony, and with enthusiasm pointed out the many interesting objects in the charming landscape.

About a stone's throw from Bishop Gabriel's house stand the picturesque ruins of Bagrat's palace, built by Bagrat IV in 1032, and destroyed by the [pg 20] Turks in 1690. There are many inscriptions in Georgian among others the following: "I King, who rulest all kings, exalt more and more Bagrat Europalates, king of Apkhazi and Kart'hli, also his father, his mother, his wife the Queen and his son Amen."

"With the help of God, Bagrat, by grace divine King of the Apkhazes and the Kart'hlians has built this holy place of prayer for his mother, Queen Guranduki"

"God have mercy on the soul of Adgurba Maisa, architect of this church."

The name, mentioned in this last inscription, is all that is left as a record of the architect of this magnificent cathedral. It is built in the Georgian-Byzantine style and there are many interesting engraved stones lying about the interior. It is surrounded by fragments of an ancient wall and at some distance is a circular earthwork, all that now remains of the fortress. The dwellers in Kutais today point out with pride the former bounds of their city extending from Bagrat's palace [pg 21] to the hills on the left bank of the Rion, and tell that it once possessed 100,000 inhabitants, whereas now there are only about 20,000.

[pg 22] Leaving Kutais, with many promises to return, we went with our kind host to pay a visit to Princess Matchutadze at Nigoili. This lady is English, and , in all the country, she is greatly admired for her goodness of heart. She looks after the peasants on her estate with the utmost consideration, and in sickness or trouble all go to her for advice and comfort. Her children speak English quite fluently, as well as Georgian. Here we were hospitably entertained by Princess Matchutadze and her husband.

From Nigoili we made oan excursion on horseback to Jumat'hi, a monastery up in the mountains, the burial place of some of the rulers of Guria. It was the beginning of January, but everywhere was spread a rich carpet of Christmas roses, snowdrops, violets, primulas and other flowers. The christmas roses were especially beautiful, being very large an of a pale primrose colour tinged with pink, After riding about five miles in level country, the road, or rather path, began to rise, and for about two hours we travelled

among mountains, the panorama becoming [pg 23] more and more extensive until we reached the monastery.

Jumat'hi is situated on a spur of the Chakhatauri range of mountains, which separates the basin of the Rion from that of the Supsa. It is 1644 feet above the level of the sea and is on the highest peak save one of the range. The views from Jumat'hi cannot be surpassed. To the Northward stretches the main chain of the Caucasus every frosty peak of which can be seen clearly outlined on the azure sky; between lie the rich valley of the Inguri, Khopi, Rion and Tsqal Tsit'heli. To the Eastward is the Kart'hli - Imeret'hi chain, while to the South rise the snow clad summits of the Aj'hara-Akhaltzikhe range, forming a wall, to the undulated meadows of Guria. The Bay of Batum lies before us and the fair coast beyond as far as Trebizon can be discerned. To the Westward stretches the Eastern shore of the Black Sea, with its capes and gulfs, gradually fading into a distant mist; Poti lying by the lake Palestom can be distinctly seen.

[pg 24] At Jumat'hi we were entertained by Father Arsen, a kind, simple-hearted monk, the guardian of these solitudes; he showed us all that was interesting. In former times the monastery was very rich, being the seat of a bishopric, and there are still many fine icons. The church was faced with grey porphyry about twenty years ago.

From Jumat'hi we went to Supsa, where we spent two days at the winter residence of the Princes of Guria, who ruled the whole province until about the middle of the present century. It is a family remarkable in many ways. The personal appearance of its members is highly distinguished among other characteristics they have magnificent heads of hair, dark and wavy. A Gurieli seldom wears a hat, as his locks are sufficient protection from the heat of summer or cold of winter. Their features are exceedingly fine and regular, lighted by an expression at the same time intelligent and wild. One can see that the race has been warlike, and one can readily believe the many tales told of its valour. It has produced one of the finest modern Georgian poets -- [pg 25] Mamia Gurieli who died about two years ago. Throughout the country his poems are known, although all have not yet been printed. Telemaque Gurieli, the present head of the family, is an enthusiastic student of his native literature.

Many Princes and Princesses, clad in rich native costumes, came to Supsa to see the English visitors. To give an idea of the dress of the women, I shall describe one worn by a tall well built lady. Over a long princess front, of rich white silk embroidered heavily in gold, was worn a robe of pale sea green silk, and from the waist hung to the feet two ends of a white sash also embroidered in gold. The neck was bare, and adorned with necklaces, and the sleeves flowed loose from above the elbows. The Kart'hlian headdress consists of a band of velvet or silk about two inches wide, embroidered in silks or precious stones, placed round the brow and meeting on the top of the head. From this there hangs over the shoulders [pg 26] a lace veil, and the hair is usually arranged with a plait behind and a long curl at each side of the face. The Gurian headdress is formed by gracefully arranging a lace scarf, black or coloured, the hair falling in a long plait behind. Both of these headdresses are very pretty -- the Gurian perhaps lending a more youthful appearance to the features, while the Kart'hlian gives an air of dignity to the wearer. This suits the characters of the inhabitants of the different provinces, for while the Kart'hlian is serious and thoughtful, the Gurian is more volatile and gay.

From Supsa we went to Ozurget'hi, the capital of Guria. The town is small, indeed , it is scarcely more than a large village, but the inhabitants display great literary activity. There is a printing press and many interesting books are published. Here we were the guests of the descendant of the ancient at'habags, aor rulers of Akhaldzikhe, who treated us with the [pg 27] greatest hospitality.

From Ozurget'hi we made our excursion to Shemokmedi a monastery situated on the river Bzudji. We have good reason to remember this river, for our carriage was many times nearly overturned in rattling over its rocky bed, while the water was within about an inch of our feet. Shemokmedi, like all the other monasteries in the country was, in former times, fortified, and the whole of Guria was subject to its sway. Much land belongs to the monastery, but the charters have been either lost or stolen. There are two naves joined together, the smaller and more ancient being lighted by an octagonal cupola. The building is of brick inside, and outside of bluish porphyry, much defaced by time. It is the burial place of the Gurielis.

Abbot Ambrose, a tall fair Kart'hlian, received us with great kindness. The evening before he had sent us an invitation to dine at the [pg 28] monastery and we made a merry party of a dozen.

On the day of our departure from Ozurget'hi; the town gave us a farewell banquet in the club, and I shall never forget the enthusiasm and good will of these kind Gurians. Time after time they entreated us to come back soon, and we had countless invitations to country houses. The banquet lasted about two hours, and only came to an end because we were obliged to leave by the evening train for Batum. Among the eighty guests were some very tall men -- three of them being seven feet high. Before departing one of these drank a bottle of native champagne, without taking breath, to our happy journey. At last we drove off amid the cheers of all the assembled guests, who came out on the balcony to bid us goodbye.

The hospitality of the Iberians has never been questioned. Rust'haveli, their great poet of the XII century, says in "The Man in the Panther's Skin" "What thou givest away is thine own, [pg 29] what thou keepest is lost" and his countrymen have never failed to put this precept into practice. One of the commonest sayings in Georgian is "A guest is a gift from God," and meanness is a vice quite unknown among them.

Simple, warm-hearted and imaginative, their social life is very attractive to one accustomed to the conventionalities of modern life, and one could not imagine a more delightful repose than that found in some beautiful Georgian village.

Even the peasants have a culture of their own, founded on an intimate knowledge of their classical writers; their language lends itself admirably to rhyme and rhythm, and almost everyone in the country is an amateur versifier. Minstrels still stroll about from village to village playing on the sazandari (a musical instrument, resembling a flute) and improvising verses and tabs of brigandage and love.

[pg 30] Among the numerous Georgian men of letters living at present, Prince Ilia Chavchavadze takes the first place. He is not only a great poet, but a novelist, director of the Nobles' Bank and editor of "Iveria" a literary and political Georgian daily paper. His poems are remarkable for their nobility of thought and elegance of language, but above

all for the spirit of deep patriotism which breathes in every line. An ardent lover of nature, he is reminded by her every phrase of the past glory and present degradation of his country. Looking upon Mt. Kazbek, he sees the spirit of his beloved land gazing down with grief on the sad change in Iveria -- Iveria, in former days, so glorious and powerful, o'er whom had ruled the God of freedom. Weeping for the past by the pure and silvery Aragva, he remembers the days when by that stream the voice of Georgia thundered against her foes, he remembers how often those clear waters have been dyed crimson by blood shed for liberty. When spring awakens all the earth into glad new life, he sadly asks when [pg 31] his beloved land will awaken.

Prince Acaci Tseret'heli is a poet who, in the estimation of many of his countrymen, ranks at least as high as Chavchavadze. His muse is lighter, and he loves merriment, and where Ilia would dwell with regret on the past, Acaci would use his powerful satire in criticising the present. He is heartily devoted to the welfare of his country and is extremely popular with the people, who all love him.

Prince Ivane Machabeli deserves attention from the English, for he is an earnest student of Shakespeare, and has excellently translated several of his plays into Georgian. These are widely read and appreciated.

Like all mountainous peoples the Geogians have very vivid imaginations and a great love of poetry. It would be impossible to mention here all the poets and poetesses who have made themselves a name, but I hope that soon the English public will be better [pg 32] acquainted with the rich literature, ancient and modern, of this people -- a people to little known in the West, although in sympathy they have always leaned to the West rather than to the East. As early as the XI and XII centuries their young nobles were sent to Greece for their education, and ever since those days they have striven to gain their knowledge from Europe rather than from Asia.

Besides "Iveria," there are several journals and gazettes published in the Georgian tongue. Every month appears "Moambe" a literary and scientific journal; while weekly are published: "Gvali" and illustrated family, literary paper; "Meureue", devoted to

agriculture; “Jejeli”, an illustrated children’s magazine, and “Mtsqemsi”, a religious journal.

It is a great pity that this brave, little country, which has for so many centuries kept its independence, fighting against fearful odds for the christian faith, should now [pg 33] be in danger of losing its nationality through the stupidity of Russia. The Georgians are naturally loyal, and this they have, many a time in the present century, shown, but the best way to preserve their loyalty and friendship is not by forbidding the use of their mother tongue, not by steadily crushing out every national idea. Russia, the Christian country to which King Iracli II appealed for protection when almost overcome by the cruel invasion of Agha Mahmud Khan in 1795, has been as sore an enemy to the land as the Mohammedans. Deliberately she has sought to extinguish the language, forbidding it to be taught in schools except as a foreign tongue and only in the two lowest classes. Consequently. When a schoolboy has finished his course, he has almost forgotten his mother tongue. His native literature, infinitely richer than that of the Russians, is comparatively unknown to him; his race is falsely spoken of with scorn as a conquered people; and, although he has, in a manner, become Russianized [pg 34] inferior men, if born Russians, are continually preferred before him. The Russian service is read in the churches, and the people are giving up attending Divine service. The Ecclesiastical Seminary in Tiflis was closed in the spring of last year, after being invaded by an armed force, because the students desired to receive instruction in their mother tongue which the Russians call a “jargon”. These students were not allowed to continue their education at any other school, or university in the Empire. Children at school are reprimanded for receiving offers from their mothers in the Georgian tongue, often the only language their parents know. The Armenians are receiving a large share of attention just now, and it seems a great pity that a little should not be bestowed on their neighbours, who need it at least as much. For it is doubtful which is more deplorable -- an occasional massacre and an immediate arousal of sympathy for the sufferers, or the long and cruel despair endured while a stronger [pg 35] nation is energetically treading on national life and liberty, and crushing out the dearest ideas. Resistance is impossible, and the police system is vigilant.

For instance, a private club for girls was formed in Kutais, meeting at different houses for the purpose of reading the Georgian classics. After a few meetings a force of gendarmes entered the house where they were assembled and forbade any future meetings.

Russia forgets that Georgia is not a conquered country; she voluntarily implored the aid of Russia, and, by the treaty with that country on Nov 19th 1800, the Emperor Paul declared that all their rights and privileges should be respected. The oppression and despotism with which Georgia is treated must result either in the total Russification of the country, with the merging of a higher civilization in a lower, or else in the rising of the people, stung into action by the insidious and cruel attack on its national life. It is to Western Europe [pg 36] that the Ancient Kingdom of Georgia looks to for help and sympathy.

Marjory Wardrop