

# BATOUM

[AN IMPRESSION IN CIVILIZATION]

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A YEAR or two ago the writer was in a town of European Russia. At least the map and the slow-voiced, melancholy clerk at Kieff, who had sold him the railway ticket, called it European Russia. Also was the hotel European, the railway depot, the gray-coats of the soldiers, the garages, the restaurants, the music-halls, the bundles of bald statistics which the American and the British Consuls pressed upon well-introduced and curious visitors, and a good many of the women who paraded up and down the central, tree-lined Boulevard at all hours.

I walked about the streets, by myself, listening to the noises of the town. I listened carefully, and presently a little fact impressed and disturbed me:

There was hardly ever the sound of a European language. There was instead a babel, a commingling of many tongues which must have seemed as amazingly unintelligible to a casual American visitor as the Spanish of Columbus was to the Caribs. For there was spitting, purring Armenian, gliding, feline Persian, Turkish as clear and limpid as a brook, majestic Georgian, explosive Swanetian, sing-song Mongolian of many dialects, harsh Arabic and guttural, uncouth Pukhtu. Once in a while I heard a broken fragment of English, French, German and Russian. But these fragments seemed unreal, bizarre. They were like the memories of a lost, forgotten world . . . quite useless, and a little pathetic.

I looked at the people. There was an endless, fascinating variety . . . everyday-looking to themselves no doubt; but to a visitor from the West they must have seemed somehow strange, somehow half-terrible, half-hateful . . . with their bearded, wild faces, hooked noses, flashing eyes, and flowing bourkas; with their evil-looking Black Sea knives stuck in gorgeous belts, rifles swung across great, supple

shoulders, cartridge-belts of silver and ivory, once in a while a wicked curved sabre clanking on the pavement.

"Asia!" I said to myself, and perhaps my heart beat a little faster. But I thought of what the Russian officer had told me: of British and Belgian and French capital, of the ships in the harbor, the trade with all the world, and the many little shops.

It is there that I shall find Europe, I thought, and I walked from shop to shop.

I bought Russian cigarettes. Of course. Then I entered the other shops.

The clerk who showed me American shoes was a Persian.

"American shoes? Certainly." He produced a well-known brand.

"How much?"

"Thirty roubles."

We had been speaking in Russian. Now I addressed him in Persian. He smiled, and showed me another pair of shoes. It looked exactly like the first pair. I bought it. It cost me twelve roubles. It was made in Japan.

The owner of the "*Ville de Paris*" perfumery store wore a blue turban with a bit of steel stuck in its folds. He was a Sikh from India. I asked for perfume, and he put some long, bizarre bottles on the counter. They looked familiar to me. Years ago, I had bought similar bottles in Kabul.

"But have you no French perfumes?" I inquired. "You call your establishment the '*Ville de Paris*.'"

"Yes," he replied. "I carry French perfume . . . a few bottles . . . very high-priced. But the perfume I have shown you is cheaper and better. Take this attar of roses. It will remind you of Kashmere."

It was so with the other shops. The haberdasher was a Tartar who sold me a box of handkerchiefs made in China and a necktie made in Bokhara. The glass merchant was a Circassian who handled mostly Persian wares, and the Armenian who owned the candy booth imported his sweets from Turkey and India.

Yet I knew that the Russian had spoken the truth. Fifteen years ago the town had been barbaric, half-Asian, quite unknown.

To-day it was known. European capital had poured golden floods into the district, and was receiving huge dividends, from steamship lines and docks and oil-wells. If wealth is the opposite of barbarism, the town was barbaric no more. But was the town any less Asiatic because of the new conditions, the new wealth, because of the hotel, the garage, the music-halls, and the European women who paraded the streets?

When Russian system, French and British capital, American and European engineers and traveling salesmen opened up this new territory in "European Russia" to all the world, did they not start at least even with Asian competition?

Why, I thought, it was nearer to Berlin than to Lahore, nearer to Paris than to Chengtu, nearer to London than to Canton, practically as near to New York as to Yokohama. And the mail and transport service which connected this town with the West was better and safer and cheaper than that which connected it with the East.

Why then the Persian who sold Japanese shoes, the Sikh who sold Indian perfumes, the Tartar who sold Chinese handkerchiefs, the Circassian who sold Persian glass? Why the flowing borkas, the black and yellow bashliks, the Black-Sea knives, the many-colored turbans? Where were Messieurs Thompson, O'Neill, Macdonald, Schmidt, Durand, and Levy?

Why, in this meeting-ground of East and West, opened up by the West in the first place, did European coat and trousers look as much out of place as plaid knickerbockers and nailed boots in some dim cathedral aisle?

Late that night I was sipping my tea in a little café which spread its tables invitingly on the pavement, enjoying the cool breeze which came shorewards over the Black Sea. My Russian friend had gone to the Apollon Music-Hall to hear the Spanish singer and the American negroes; and by my side sat Chin Ko-Ou, the Chinaman.

I spoke to him of the questions which were bothering me; and he answered me.

At least he thought he answered me. But be it remembered that Chin Ko-Ou was also an enthusiast, just like my Russian friend, and to me at least it seemed that his answer had nothing whatever to do with the questions which I had asked him.

"Always," said the Chinaman, speaking in French, "always since the world evolved from a pellet of star-dust, has the West been swallowed by the East.

"I will not speak of war. What meaning can there be to me, a Chinaman, a civilized man, in a sword which is red and a land hissing with blood?

"So I will not mention the fact that a small federation of Mongol tribes swept over Europe, reached France, after enslaving Russia and Germany, and nearly overthrew the Roman Empire on the plains of the Chalons. I will not mention the fact that a handful of Arabs, debouching from their arid desert, destroyed the Vandals of North Africa, conquered Spain and Sicily, and, long after their energy had decayed, drove the picked chivalry of Europe out of Palestine. I will not mention how a tiny little Asian tribe, the Turks, warred down the Eastern Empire of Rome, threatened all Central Europe, and still holds on to a good proportion of its early conquests.

"These are the things foreign barbarians boast of. Not I. I see things as they are. I see this town," he pointed a thin yellow hand at the streets which were still packed with the men of all Asia in spite of the late hour, "its wealth, and its progress.

"And so I repeat: always, since first an Egyptian or a Chinaman considered the wisdom of graving the annals of his family, his clan, his nation, on stone and brick, has the West given way before the East.

"Always, since first race spoke to race across the chasm of mistrust and dislike, has Asia taught and influenced Europe. This influence, this teaching, has time and again lain stagnant for centuries . . . but without rotting or

staling; always keeping intact the marvel and the swing of its energy, its vitality.

"Asia has given to Europe the first-fruits of civilization and culture: letters, articulate speech, arithmetics, medicine, astronomy, the knowledge to guide a ship out of the sight of land. Take the sum-total of these few things, and you obtain Trade and Exploration.

"We know that early Mongols and Malays reached the South Pacific and America; that early Hindoos converted and civilized Java; that early Malays conquered and governed . . . still govern . . . Madagascar; that the Arabs traded with China before Mohammed was born. All these things were done when an expedition to Britain or Gaul or Germany appeared to the Romans as a wonderful audacity, worthy to be celebrated in prose and poetry.

"Europe never came to Asia. The Greeks built up a whole literature about the fact that Asia invaded their country . . . and not because they invaded Asia. Afterwards the descendants of Alexander, the Macedonian Generals, founded a few dynasties in Western Asia. They disappeared, and they did not leave even a trace of themselves behind. Nothing European has ever taken firm root in Asia. If England left India tomorrow, inside of three hundred years the very name of England would be forgotten. Thus with the Americans in the Philippines, with the French in Indo-China.

"Not one Asian nation, not a single tribe, not even a single Asian individual has ever become completely Europeanized. Not a single European idea, habit, custom, not a single distinctively European branch of knowledge has ever penetrated into Asia . . . unless it came from Asia in the first place. Europe has copied. But Europe has never originated.

"Therefore this town. Centuries ago, the Black Sea was a centre of Asian influence and civilization and trade. We forgot it. We had so many other things to think of, to attend to. Then Europe, utilizing the lessons learned from us, re-discovered this port.

"Then we saw. We came. And you, my friend, this evening you bought Japanese shoes from a Persian, Chinese handkerchiefs from a Tartar, Persian glass from a Circassian."

"What else did you expect?"

The next day I repeated the conversation to the Russian officer. He smiled.

"I know Chin Ko-Ou," he said. "A nice old Chinaman, but a dreamer, a visionary. This is Europe. This is Russia. We have made it and built it. Trade and progress and wealth." He lit a cigarette. "By the way, you must come to the Apollon Music-Hall tonight. You will hear a French soubrette and some capital American negroes."

I did go, and in the box next to mine sat the Persian shoe-merchant. He recognized me and leaned over the low railing which divided the two boxes.

"A good show," he said, "don't you think so? We Asians import these play-people from Europe to sing and dance for us. They do not cost much. Also we can afford it. This is a wealthy town."

# THE IMPERIAL BATTLE

E. HUDSON STRODE

**T**HERE were only two military autocracies left in the world, but they were very powerful and extremely jealous of each other. At least their emperors were jealous. The people themselves had only a feeling of common humanity and brotherly interest. They were military because it made for efficiency and because their rulers demanded the system, and blindly, they still accepted the divine-right-of-kings theory. For many years both empires had been pouring wealth and labor and scientific research and human beings into the mold that was turning out a magnificent model of military organization. At each move of one emperor there was a counter action by the other. Their armies were matched man for man, spy for spy, ammunition for ammunition, preparedness for preparedness. It was impossible for one to steal a march on the other. And as both nations were equipped and ready to the utmost limit, the war might as well come, they argued. In the final death struggle both monarchs were supremely confident of victory.

So war was declared.

The night before the opening battle the young men of both countries lined up along the boundary line, lay awake and thought—What will *we* get out of this? We are young. We have our lives to live, our ambitions to realize, our wives and sweethearts to love, our children to beget. Why were we not consulted?

Indeed, why were they not consulted? Why should they march at the command of the old men, the politicians and the big corporation leaders? Why was it in the power of a selected few law makers to set rolling the ruthless wheel of death?

The first in one country to give utterance to these thoughts was a conscripted young actor—the juvenile in a