

THE CIRCASSIAN LOVERS.

Jamesa," said the boy, in the ear of the warrior.

"Ozban, son of Mafoo, and brother of the Snowflake," whispered Jamesa, without altering his position, "tell me where they have imprisoned thy sister?"

"In the house of the Moslem who sells salt and cloth to the Tcherkesses on the Kuban and who sends our brothers and sisters to be slaves at Stamboul," answered the boy, in the same suppressed tone.

It is only when the cold and obdurate pebble is struck by some hard antagonistic substance that the fire-flashes of its essence sparkle forth to illumine its own nature, and to rouse the wonder of those who had never dreamed of the light and heat that were hidden beneath its lustreless surface. Jamesa, the cold and phlegmatic; he who in derision had been called by his comrades the "tame;" he who had suffered and plodded on in his hopeless existence as a shepherd, had suddenly become transformed in nature. He rose from his recumbent position, and drew his tall form up to its full height with a dignity and look of firmness that impressed his companions with wonder. A steel plated casque covered his head instead of his sheepskin shako; hazirs, or steel tubes full of powder, were arranged upon his breast; a chain corslet supplied the place of his tunic of linseywolsey, and stockings of brown limbs; a long carbine was slung upon his left shoulder, and in his belt were his bent scimitar and dagger.

"Brothers," he said, "I have slept too long in the valley while the Moscovs were crushing my people; I am awake now, however, and Nirkoff must know of it. Rouse the Tcherkesses of the mountains, and meet me two nights hence at the grave of fair-haired Ardan, who sleeps by the ruined church on the borders of the Lake Keziltash. I am the son of Indar-Oku, and I feel my father speaking in me at last."

"At the grave of Ardan, and with well-tempered swords, we will meet you," responded all the warriors simultaneously; then they drew again, sheathed their gleaming weapons and settled into silence.

Next morning a poor Circassian lad, lame and ragged, but with an eye that belied the assumed stupidity of his countenance, limped through the little settlement of Kleti. A rope of plaited grass was slung over his shoulder, and two little baskets full of trout were suspended upon it, one hanging behind, the other before him. He was a handsome athletic boy, and would have brought

a goodly price at Stamboul, but his left leg was a bad match to its dexter companion, and a rude crutch had to assist him in his locomotion, so that Hamed and Nirkoff would have wasted little upon a slave so useless save the stroke of a knife or a bullet perhaps. "Buy my mountain trout, brave Russians," cried the boy, in discordant querulous tones; "oh, give a few kopecks to the poor lame Tcherkess!" The indifferent looks that were thrown upon him by the lazy military, who began to saunter about the alleys of the irregularly constructed town, and the careless glances that were cast upon him by the civilians, showed that his presence created neither pity nor wonder. He kept bawling his merchandise, however, and limping onward, till he arrived at the door of Hamed's dwelling, where sitting down as if greatly fatigued with walking, he shouted more loudly than before, "Buy my mountain trout."

"Go away, you lazy fish-seller," exclaimed an old woman, opening the door and eyeing the boy angrily; "go away to the fort and don't disturb people; General Nirkoff will buy your trout and pay you handsomely for them."

"Ah, madam," said the boy, softly, "I am weary, and the fort is distant. General Nirkoff might pay me handsomely," he continued, looking timidly up, and modulating his tones to the softest and most deferential cadence they could assume; "but he is not so good a judge of trout as thou art, I am certain; nor would his handsome payment equal the handsome hand that will dole me a few kopecks for this, and this, and this."

As he spoke, the face of the duenna relaxed into a smile, and when he drew out the silvery fishes and laid them out before her eyes, she quickly lifted them up, beckoned him into the house, and closed the door.

"Lady," said the child, hesitatingly, after he had been seated a few seconds, and had looked indifferently around him; "now I bethink me, I will not take money for the trouts. Will you fill one of my baskets with Stamboul salt, and all my fishes shall be thine? They have none in the valleys to the east."

"Alack, my dear," said the garrulous dame, in affected sorrow, "how unlucky! I have not a pile till to-night."

"Then I will come for it to-morrow," said the lad, quickly.

"Not for two days," said the old dame, in a whisper. "Rameth lands his cargo to-night, one hour after sundown, by the fane of Keziltash, and he departs not till the same hour to-morrow night, with the felucca and the slaves; so let it be two days before thou comest."