

THE CIRCASSIAN LOVERS.

A STORY OF RUSSIAN TYRANNY.

"I HAVE not a kopeck, and Jamesa is on the hills," said old Zoe, as she wrung her hands and rocked her head from side to side, and looked at the Russian tax-gatherer in unutterable suffering and perplexity.

"You have robes in the guest-house, and there are two mares with their foals in the paddock yonder," answered a surly, insolent-looking soldier, perfectly indifferent to Zoe's wailing; "so we won't trouble your coffers, nor wait for Jamesa's return."

"The tribute is only two sheep in the score, or a money equivalent," said the old woman quickly; "you would not surely take the horse creatures and the furniture of the divan for what Jamesa's tribute comes to?"

"The transfer is to Jamesa's advantage," said the official, coolly; "you see he has a hundred score of sheep, which makes him owe the emperor ten score; mutton, horns, and wool. Money is heavy, especially the price of ten score of sheep in kopecks, so that we would be burdened with its weight to Kleti, or retarded in the valleys by the slow pace of the ewes and lambs. But the mares will carry both us and the clothes, and Jamesa can borrow more if he needs them."

"One hundred score of sheep!" exclaimed Zoe, rocking backward and forward, and turning her eyes upward as she clasped her hands together convulsively; "oh, the consciences of these Russians! the poor youth has scarcely five score, and yet they make his absence a pretext to rob him of his only wealth—his horses and his robes."

"Take care that we do not take your ears with us, you Tcherkessian rebel," said the Russian, as with the utmost coolness he began to collect the robes and arms which were suspended from the long ox-horns that garnished the walls of Jamesa's lodge. "Ay, and put a bridle on your tongue, lest we be constrained to cut it from your head, and give it to the dogs to eat."

Zoe looked at the stony agent of the czar with astonishment, and fear that he would carry his threat into execution kept her silent for a few seconds; but she saw him, without the least compunction, take possession of all her own and Jamesa's garments; she heard him order his

subordinates to catch the mares which grazed in the beautiful paddock which Jamesa had fenced for them; and, being a woman of generous sympathies and a goodly proportion of the chivalry of her sex, she forgot all her hazards, and opened the battery of her voice and wrath upon the brutal tribute-gatherer. "You have built your forts and lodges at Kleti and Anapa," she cried, "and you have made yourselves masters of Nefil and Vastoghai; you say that you have come to protect us and to be our friends—such friends as the eagles of Noghai Huskha are to the lambs of Elbruz, or your red-haired tribe proved to the cringing Mengrelians; you are robbers and cowards, for you dare not go into the mountains of Notwatsh to meet the men of Circassia, but you crawl tremblingly through the valleys and rob from women and children."

"Peace, hag!" exclaimed the passionate Russ, as he sprung upon the excited old woman and caught her by the throat; "I will crush thy venomous spirit out of thy mouth if thou sayest another word."

"And I will trample thy cowardly one from all thy body, thou wretch!" exclaimed Jamesa, as he bounded into his lodge, caught the Russian in his arms, and throwing him on the ground, placed his foot upon his neck.

You would have gone to many councils on the hills, and to many harvest-feasts upon the plains of Circassia, before you would have beheld a nobler looking youth than Jamesa; yet there was something anomalous in his character after all. Eight and twenty glowing summers and an equal number of cold winters had passed over the head of the young man, and although few in the valley or on the mountains of Nefil could manage the steed or use the rifle with him, he had never been an active or prominent agent in the wars. He lived close upon the Kuban, and had often been the victim of plunder and destruction, but he seemed to possess a patience superior to Russian malignity, and an attachment to his native home which was strong enough to outlive his possession of one blade of its grass. His father had been slain by a band of soldiers from Kleti; his aged mother had died from exposure