

and wooden varandahs, together with their projecting eaves and straw or rush-thatched roofs, giving the place more the aspect of an untidily kept and thriftless farm house than the dwelling of a religious order. The only building which had any semblance of architectural comeliness about it was the church, with its large central cupola, surmounted by a Greek cross, and flanked by two small turrets, likewise roofed with tin. High, narrow windows were contrived in the whitewashed walls, from which, however, the ill tempered plaster had fallen in many places; through these windows the wind sighed sadly, and the birds of heaven built their nests undisturbed above the meanly furnished high altar. A picture of misery and wretchedness, of poverty and neglect, and yet, a most fitting abode for the ignorant and boorish cloister life, which, in these regions, dirty, lazy and subsisting by begging, shambled through life in a sort of moral and material hopelessness. Old chronicles relate that the monks of the West not infrequently exchanged the cross for the sword and the cowl for the casque, and that they went forth ready for the fight and eager for it, and waged doughty warfare on behalf of the church and fatherland, and made the enemies of both feel the weight of their sturdy blows; but who would have expected from these Bulgarian monks anything but dumb, stupid submission? It was not an *Ecclesia triumphans* nor even an *Ecclesia militans* that was to be seen there; but only the most sorrowful and afflicted of all suffering churches: only a martyrdom without glory, without echo, a slow, lingering sickening to the death, a needless and inglorious suffocation in the reeking and fetid swamp.

One of the monks caught sight of the little caravan from a distance and went to inform the Father Abbot of the approach of the strangers, and to get the roomy hall set apart for the reception of travellers in one of the outlying buildings, ready for the expected guests: a task which, to be sure, required only a short time, since nothing more was done than open the windows, wipe off the heavy layer of dust which had accumulated an inch thick upon the divans, the cushions of which had once shone with the rich play of their varied colours, but were now faded and dirty; or, perhaps, brush down a few of the cobwebs which hung too low from the ceiling for comfort. While the lay-brothers were performing these duties under the inspection of the monk who had announced the approach of the travellers, the monks were gathering together around the Abbot in the court-yard, and when Ilia's waggon halted before the walls the occupants of the monastery, with their superior at their head, stepped through the gateway to give their visitors a friendly greeting.

"Welcome to my humble house!" exclaimed the Abbot, addressing himself to Werner, who occupied the seat next to Ilia upon the first waggon, and whom he naturally enough regarded as the chief personage of the expedition. "Ye are Christians as well as ourselves, and it is with peculiar pleasure that we open to you our gate. Praise be Jesus Christ."

"For ever, amen!" answered Werner, who was acquainted with the customs of the East. "We shall not abuse your hospitality, venerable Father, nor trespass upon it long. We intend hunting in these mountains and, if it be permitted us, will gladly remember your house in the division of our game."

The worthy Abbot bowed a courteous response with dignified grace, while the monks, not seeking to conceal their pleasure at the prospect of the promised dainties, exchanged significant glances, as if they already inhaled the delicate savour which the fat roast venison diffused around the tables. As they stood there with their bony, coarsely-built forms and unlovely countenances of a strongly marked Slavonic-Tatar type, the eye turned gladly from them to rest upon the face and figure of their Abbot. A delicate, slender, almost emaciated form was his, with clearly cut and noble features, eminently ecclesiastical, but far from monkish in their character. The outline of his face had nothing in common with that of the monks over whom he ruled; the refined and prominent nose; the absence of beard, the long flowing hair, streaked with silver, falling lightly upon his shoulders; the large, dark, penetrating eyes; the deep, thoughtful furrows between the bushy eyebrows, all bore silent but eloquent testimony that this man was of a very different stamp to that of the Bulgarian monk. This man's life, assuredly, had not been passed amid the soulless, mind-destroying sloth of an Eastern cloister. This face gave no reflection of an ossified monachism occupied with the paltry gossip of the convent, or immersed in the outward observances of a mechanical devotion. Like this Abbot in the remote Monastery of Badadagh those Byzantine Church fathers must have appeared, of whom history relates that they dominated alike over court and people by the magnetic influence of their glance and the power of an irresistible eloquence.

The hunters were preparing to enter the monastery; but, with a courteous smile and extended hands, the Abbot checked their advance.

"My honoured guests," said he, "in conformity with an old custom, I cannot suffer you to cross this threshold until I learn who you are, what are your names, where ye dwell, and whence ye come. It is also well that people be mutually acquainted before they enter into closer relations the one with the other. One speaks more freely and with less constraint when one knows beforehand what one must not say or had best leave unsaid."

The introduction was soon made. The name, nationality, descent and profession of each of the party were smilingly made known to the Abbot by the Secretary, who concluded by saying that they were recommended personally to the good offices of the Abbot by the Pasha of Isakcha who prided himself on being a friend and old acquaintance of the venerable father.

"I thank you," replied the Abbot: "the Pasha and I are known to each other of old, and although we differ in many things we love and respect one another mutually. If he has not told you my name suffer me to tell it to you myself: I am called Cyrill by the brethren, and I strive to do no discredit to this name which has been conferred upon me, and which was

once borne by a prince of the church. But," said he, interrupting himself and looking inquiringly upon Eurikleia, "Who is this maiden whom ye bring with you?"

"The bride of our guide, the Bulgarian, Ilia," answered Werner while he took the maiden by the hand and led her to Cyrill. "She is styled the rose of Isakcha, as we were assured by the Pasha, and she well deserves the name, for no fairer rose blooms in all Bulgaria."

"A blooming rose in very truth! Still there are many roses in our gardens, and each is distinguished from its sisters by some particular name. What is the name of the rose of Isakcha?"

"Eurikleia, venerable Father."

"Eurikleia? That is surely a foreign name?"

"She is a Greek."

"Greek!" exclaimed the Abbot, and a faint flush suffused his pale and wrinkled face, a clear, joyous light sparkled in his eyes, and taking both hands of the maiden in his he drew Eurikleia towards him with a kindly winning gesture. "Thou art a Greek? So art thou doubly welcome to me! For thy family is from my own land, lovely rose, and my old heart is filled with pride and joy that the fairest rose in all Bulgaria is a Greek. May'st thou be the best and purest as well as the fairest amongst its women, Eurikleia."

Eurikleia had knelt before the venerable Abbot, and, in accordance with Eastern custom, kissed his hand respectfully. He bent over her kindly; they exchanged a few words softly in their native Greek, and he laid his right hand, as if in blessing, upon her head.

The hunters gazed not unmoved upon this lovely picture; but none of them perceived the agitation which had suddenly overmastered the Turk when he saw Eurikleia and the Abbot engaged in conversation. Demir Keran had understood nothing of the foreign tongue; but it seemed to his simple soldier's judgment that the beautiful young Christian whom he had received orders to conduct to his master was going to be snatched from his grasp by this monk and his monastery. Many a time and oft had his comrades, while upon the march or seated around their bivouac fires, spoken of the Christian maidens who, in order to avoid the splendid slavery of the Grand Seigneur's harem, had suddenly disappeared behind the walls of a convent. And, so the simple, rude soldiery were wont to relate, when the heavy door of the cloister had once shut behind a girl there was no power in heaven or on earth which could bring back the vanished one, for deeper, gloomier than the deepest grave of the Moslem was the cloister of the Christians. In the former, away yonder beneath the shadow of the slender cypresses, waving gently to and fro in the wind, they slept quietly and softly amid the songs of the birds and the joyous laughter of the little Turkish children; but here, behind this convent wall, life itself was lived no more, here there was nothing but the silence of eternal death. So the Turkish soldiers were wont to speak, and what wonder if Demir Keran believed all they said? What wonder if he believed that this very day, now, just before his eyes, the convent gates were going to open to snatch from his grasp the maiden destined for the harem of his sovereign? Should such an insult be offered to his master and he standing there? Was not his good musket in his hand? was not his trusty yataghan hanging by his side? And was not his name Demir Keran: he who breaks iron—and Christians too, if need be?

His mind was soon made up. With a bound, as though he were trying to seize a fleeing doe, the Turk broke through the line of the gazing hunters and grasping Eurikleia with his powerful hand, exclaimed:

"Let her go! By Allah! You have no business with her, she belongs to my master, the Pasha of Isakcha!"

"Thou liest, dog! Here is my master!"

Eurikleia, who had sunk almost prone upon the earth beneath the heavy hand of the soldier, as she uttered, or rather shrieked the words, wrenched herself suddenly from his grasp and lay, ere Demir had time to prevent her, flushed and excited on Werner's breast, her flashing eyes turned proudly upon the Turk, and seemingly challenging him to dare to molest her further. With a passionate gesture she twined her arms round Werner's neck; it was from him she sought help, from him who had promised to defend her. Werner felt her warm breath upon his cheek, he felt the heaving of her bosom against his breast, he felt, also, how her strained muscles quivered with the tension, and her little hands clasped him round the neck like bands of iron. A mist seemed to pass before the eyes of the startled youth and hide every object from his view except the frightened girl who was clinging to his neck; and as he held her locked tightly in his arms, as he passed his hand protectingly round her slender form, as his eyes gazed down into hers, he felt all the intoxication of romantic youth. It seemed as if his whole being had blossomed forth in one exulting spring time; he thought neither of the astounded hunters who stood gazing round, nor of the unhappy Ilia, who, pale as death and riveted to the ground, was staring fixedly at them both; nor of the furious Turk who with his hand upon the hilt of his yataghan appeared about to attack them; nor of the old Abbot, who holding back the soldier, stood speechless among his troubled and frightened monks.

"Fear nothing, Eurikleia," he whispered softly in the ear of the trembling, clinging girl, and drew her nearer to his burning lips; "I will protect and defend thee, lovely rose. Be mine, fair rose," he added as he gazed into her eyes, and pressed his trembling lips upon hers.

A deep blush overspread her face, she did not avoid the kiss, nay, it seemed even as if she returned it, then suddenly she loosed herself from his arms.

"No!" she exclaimed, as she drew herself from Werner's embrace, "no! I am not my sister!"

"Eurikleia! calm thyself!" answered Werner, who had understood