

THE SABRES OF PARADISE:

Conquest and Vengeance in the Caucasus

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with a new foreword by Philip Marsden



TPP

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PAPERBACKS

explored the Eastern provinces and dispatched small government clerks to sort and classify the local gentry. There were said to be three thousand Armenian 'princes', while the Georgians were scarcely less numbered. There were, however, a few families from these regions whose beginnings were lost in antiquity, whose blood equalled any Russian, and who were named Princes of the Russian Empire too.

There were three princely Armenian families—the Argoutinskys, the Abamaleks, and the Beboutovs;

while in Georgia, the great feudal families numbered eight or ten. The House of the Bagrationis, or Bagratians, the last ruling house, comprised among other things, the dog that killed Gorkh, David's hound, the son of Solomon's house, and our Lord's wandering man. The Imeretinskys, Gurgenis, Dzhidzhakians and Mingrelikhs were scarcely less noble. Among the proud names of the *Land de Felse* were some which derived from very far afield: the Chelians—called Chinese blood; the Abkhazians, Abzantsians. A strong Tartar strain was represented by the Yousoups, Kuchukovs and Tarkovs. The Ghens descended from Genghis Khan; the Dzhordzhians from Kutumk towards (though among the Kutumks, anyone owning a flock of sheep was called *ghor*). The Vashliskians had been Grand Dukes of Lithuania, and accordingly subdued all the Baltic houses, while the Derzhins and Romanovs, descending from Sibirsk dynasty and King David, considered everyone else very small fry. And all of these banded together to persecute those of foreign origin, like the O'Brians, Lermontovs, Hamshins, or Keads, to say nothing of a legion of German names, generally concentrated in the Army lists, such as Trubnikov or Klingensons, families who had only been a generation or two in Russia, arriving there as soldiers of fortune or learned exiles. But any of the actors of the activities, any of the peasant lords who were gathered at Vladikavkaz, found themselves the object of considerable social maneuvering. Since moral and spleen were both a la mode, the young noblemen found it easy enough to suggest the worst of life in the little town: it was not nearly so boring as it was Sukhumburk to find it, and there were always hearts to break, in the manner made so romantic by Pushkin's *Onegin*.

IV

Above the town, dominating it, and set at a little distance away, was the Governor's house, centre of military life and social hopes, and the focal point of suspicious Muslim hatred, though this undercurrent of hate was generally ignored, or underestimated, by the visitors. But, abruptly, the war, killing life was ended. There was no more time for spleen. Two Cossacks from an outpost farther north galloped into town with the news that Khan Melik was reported heading north with a