

THE LOVE OF PETI.

By JOHANNES C. ANDERSEN.

PETI was a little woman, judged by the native standard, but with vitality for one with twice her stature, and vivacity for two. In her passionate nature there ran a strong undercurrent of jealousy, which her husband Tamaiti discovered, and attempted to stem it more than once, not displeased with his want of success.

Her eyes were the full lustrous brown eyes of the Maori girl, lighted in her vivacity like a mountain lake when the evening sun is about the shoulders of its confining peaks and ridges; but when her love was crossed, even in jest, her whole nature was concentrated to lightning-like looks, words and gestures, and her eyes were sinister as hot lakes reflecting the fierce flashes of intermittent volcanoes.

It was this jealous tendency that one evening induced the contemplative mood in Tama as he sat before his whare. Quietly smoking, he sat gazing steadily on the bush-clad mountains before him, as they faded from green to purple, and from purple to the sombre tints of night.

As a warrior, Tamaiti had been but indifferent: not sufficient intrepidity to secure him the name of toa—a hero, and not sufficient backwardness to cause his being dubbed hume—a coward. He was too prone to debate on probabilities—no characteristic of a warrior man.

Thus even now he was debating; but with a bias.

His caution had not advanced him greatly in his native sphere; but it had brought him wealth from the pakeha; enough to justify him in considering the question of procuring for Peti a "helper."

"Peti!" he called at last.

"Tama," and she came from within, her flax mat flung over her shoulder like a bandolier, leaving her left breast and shoulder bare.

He puffed lazily, but his thoughts were not idle. He was still revolving ways and means.

"It has seemed to me, Peti, (puff) that our whare, (puff) which grows with my wealth, (puff) calls for much of thy time."

In surprise, her brows arched towards the glossy hair billowed over her forehead. "It is nothing," said she.

"I could wish another kaitaka; (puff) finely woven and ample; (puff) mine is now but ngetangeta; (puff) rags."

"It was finished but a moon ago; it is yet good, and becoming withal." Was it vanity, thought she, and why?

"Ngetangeta;" he insisted; "Humu's is magnificent; (puff) but thy time is little; (puff) wherefore Peti,"—and he paused.

"Anana?" she queried, "well?"

"Thou knowest Waimarie?"

"Ae," with a quick glance, and a momentary gleam in her full eyes.

"A daughter of Ata, deity of morning;" said Tama, dreamily.

"Of Punga, god of all things ugly;" interrupted Peti, though scarcely above her breath.

"Nay; nay;" remonstrated Tama; "for she is to be thy helper."

"And thy helpmate?" asked Peti, sharply and bitterly.

"There is enough for two—"

"Then why three?" again interrupted Peti.

"Helpmates:" Tama finished placidly; for the volcano was but threatening, and in the darkness the lakes reflected nothing, as yet.