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GREASY THE ROBBER

*A True Story of the Power of the Gospel
from Siberia in the Late 1800s*

Translated by Charles Lukesh

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Homelife

The nickname “Greasy” was given to Paul when he was but eight years old, under special circumstances that will be mentioned later. His real family name was Tichomirow. He was the son of a farmer from one of the poorest villages in the government of Mogilew. The family consisted of the father, the mother, and two children—ten-year-old Shura (Alexandra) and eight-year-old Pasha (Paul). They lived peacefully, were religious in the orthodox way, and enjoyed the respect not only of the inhabitants of their own village, but of those of all the district.

On the holy days, the local orthodox priest used to visit them to play cards with the father—not for money, but merely to pass the time. Sometimes the game was “Dulatchki,” in which it was customary for the losing one to suffer the pack of cards to be thrown at his nose. If either of the players had some money, they sent the children for liquor, which would put them in a hilarious mood. The priest, whom they called “Batushka” (Daddy), used to say, “It is no sin to drink with moderation. Even the Lord Jesus loved to be joyful and at the wedding in Cana changed water into wine” (Joh 2:1-11).

The children loved to look on and noted with special interest how the nose of the priest would become more and more red—they did not know whether it was from the use of the liquor or from the frequent hits with the pack of cards thrown at him cleverly by the father, who usually won the game. The good-natured priest used to say with a croaking voice, “He who will endure to the end will be saved. I shall have my turn, my beloved, and then look out, because it is written, ‘Owe no man anything, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again’ (Rom 13:8).”

This hilarious life came to an abrupt end. Several successive bad harvests compelled the farmers of the village of Sosnovka to consider moving to Siberia. In groups they talked over the matter with one another and finally decided to send out messengers to find an appropriate piece of land in one of the Siberian districts. Because he was a clever and experienced man, Tichomirow was among those land-seekers. After three months the messengers returned; they had found land in the government of Tomsk. Promptly selling their land and property, the farmers started on their way. That was in the year 1897.

During the trip, the trains made slow headway and had to make long stop-overs at the crossroads in Samara, Tcheljabinsk, and Omsk. The moving farmers had to wait for weeks to get trains for further travel and had to spend the days and nights in the small railroad stations, lying on the floor. The boiled water was not sufficient for all, nor could the people afford to buy warm food from the restaurants. Consequently, the poor, simple people satisfied themselves with dried herring or other dried fish and drank unboiled water. As a result, many had stomach trouble, and cholera set in. The older people were especially afflicted by the plague.

Loss of Parents

On the last stretch before Tomsk, Mr. Tichomirow became sick. All indications signified cholera. To the horror of his wife and children, he was taken from the train in one of the stations and put in the barracks for people with infectious diseases. It was only natural that Mrs. Tichomirow and the children leave the train also. They found refuge not far from the barracks behind the snow fences along the railroad tracks. Daily they inquired about the condition of the father, but the information was more sad every time.

After three days had passed, the sorrow-stricken mother had to declare to the children that she was sick. It was a heart-breaking scene when the mother was taken away on a stretcher from the crying children. In her they lost their last support. With a sad heart the mother parted from her children, suspecting that she would never see them again. But more terrible to the mother was the possibility that her beloved children would be fully orphaned in a strange land.

As the mother was carried into the barracks, the desperate children ran crying behind the carriers until the heavy barracks door was slammed in their faces. How lonesome and miserable Shura and Pasha felt. As if bereft of their senses, they circled the barracks crying now for the father and then for the mother. The only answer they received was a coarse cry from the guard, threatening them with a whipping if they would not leave the barracks. But the children did not cease crying and asking to be let in. They wanted to die with their parents, since they felt that they could not live without them. Thus they

kept running around the barracks until late at night when the severe cold compelled them to think of their warmer clothing, which they had left with some other things behind the snow fences. However, when they came on the spot where they had abode with their mother before her sickness, they found no sign of their baggage. Apparently someone had taken the few poor things of the immigrants.

Crawling behind the snow fences, the children huddled together to keep each other warm. Shura, who was the older, was very concerned about her young brother. During the night, which seemed to her like an eternity, she did not close her eyes. As soon as Pasha awoke, the children hastened again to the barracks. The first guard they met told them, "Do not come again. This morning we carried away the body of your father, and your mother is likely to die today."

It was impossible to compel the children to leave the barracks. Again and again they looked through the windows and called for the mother. Would her beloved voice be silenced forever? And would she be only a cold corpse in the morning? Yes, in the evening they were told that the mother had died an hour ago. Hugging each other, they sat behind the snow fences and cried bitterly. That night even Pasha did not sleep; with his back against the snow fence he looked into the distance, where the rails seemed to disappear out of sight. In his childish mind the terrible happenings of the last few days passed again before him. When he finally saw the train drawing nigh, he said, "Shura, I will live no longer without Father and Mother. Come, let us lay ourselves on the rails. The engine will crush us, and then we shall be dead. What do we have to live for now? Where shall we go, and to whom shall we be of any use?" With these words Pasha took his sister by the hand and dragged her to the rails.

Shura was terrified; she took her small brother in her arms and cried with sobs, "No; for nothing in the world will I go with you to cast myself under the train. Neither will I let you go. I am terrified! It is terrible!"

"Let me go; I shall go alone!" cried the boy.

While they talked to each other, the train rushed by. Pasha threw himself on his face to the ground and began to complain loudly, "Why have you held me back? I do not want to live anymore." However, his sister spoke to him kindly in order to persuade him to give up his horrible thoughts. After a long time, when he had become calmer, he promised not to think anymore about death and not to leave her alone in the world.

After this the children huddled together in their refuge, waiting for the break of day, determined to see the grave of their parents in the morning. To the freezing and hungry children, the cold night seemed infinitely long. Finally, at daybreak they hastened to the cemetery, where in an especially enclosed corner those who had died of infectious diseases were buried. At the gate the children begged the keeper to let them in and show them the grave of their parents. But the man answered in a harsh voice, "How many bodies were carried out here only last night? How could I know who is buried here? Besides, ten bodies are usually thrown into one hole; sometimes even twenty."

Not achieving anything, the children looked with eyes red from weeping through the cracks of the fence toward the irregular mounds of wet clay. For a long time they stood there crying and looking at the graves, until the keeper drove them away. Oppressed with sorrow, the children, holding each other's hands, returned to the snow fences, which were witnesses of their cruel experiences of the last five days, including the parting with their beloved mother. This place now became the orphaned children's second home. Under the protection of these fences they began to consider what to do next.

Parting

The very thought of being put into the barracks for orphans seemed terrible to them; yet they realized that it would be their salvation from hunger, which began to be more and more intense. Their meager supply of food, as well as their money, had been taken with the rest of their baggage.

Fear overshadowed the lonesome, hungry, freezing children—even though high above them the larks were joyfully singing their spring songs and the clear rays of the sun gilded everything around. In the hearts of the orphans it was a dark night. Their mutual sorrow drew the brother and sister together. Shura tried to be a mother to her little brother. She kissed him and tried to comfort him with the following words: "We shall not despair, my beloved; God will not forsake us."

Just as the children decided to follow the railroad to the next village to beg a bite of bread, they heard above them a coarse voice. "What are you doing here? To whom do you belong?" An unknown uniformed man appeared before them and looked at them searchingly. They became so completely confused that they could not say at once that they were the children of immigrants and had just recently lost their parents. The stranger commanded them to follow him and led them into the distribution office. There it was promptly decided to send them to the barracks for orphans, where they did not want to go, because it meant separation for them. The girls' barracks were several railroad stations distant. Not heeding the pleadings and tears of the children, the officials took Pasha to the boys' barracks about two miles distant, while Shura was sent on the train to the girls' home. The sorrow of the children at parting cannot be described, for they lost in each other all that was still dear to them on earth.

Pasha was taken to the barracks where three hundred boys had already been placed. Many of them who had lived there a long time had become very mischievous, since they were now accustomed to the environment. The newcomer was greeted

by the boys with coarse jokes, shoves, and pushes. Pasha entertained only one thought within a week: to flee from the barracks. The whole surroundings—the indifference toward the needs of the children, the coarse manners of the inmates, the continuous squabbling and fighting, as well as the obnoxious dried fish soup at dinner—had become intolerable to him. The lad watched for a suitable moment for the flight.

The boys were forbidden to leave the barracks without being accompanied, but Pasha dared not tarry. He went out in the dark, climbed over a low place in the board enclosure, and ran, as if being chased, in the opposite direction of the railroad. About four miles from the barracks was the beginning of a large forest. On arriving there, Pasha felt somewhat calmer. He ran no more, but walked on, endeavoring not to lose sight of the edge of the woods, yet trying to get as far as possible from the barracks. Pasha walked until he was too tired to go further, then he lay down under a tree and was soon fast asleep. He dreamed that he was overtaken and carried back to the barracks, where he received a whipping and the obnoxious fish soup was continuously poured into his open mouth.

Discovered

The warm spring sun was already high in the sky when the little runaway awoke. The manifold song of the birds almost deafened him; it seemed as though the feathery songsters wanted to boast of their art before the intruder in their green domain. Pasha arose and thought about what to do next. He decided to return to his home village of Sosnovka; he had not forgotten the name of his district or country. What good times he used to have in Sosnovka! He remembered the small but beautiful river where he had bathed and caught fish with the other children. He would like very much to have seen his beloved sister before going, but where or how could he find her? Besides, it terrified him to think that he might be found and brought back to the barracks. Therefore, he bravely decided to go on so that he would soon be far from the hated place; then he would inquire more particularly about the way to his home village.

With the exception of one village where he begged bread, he avoided the homesteads all that day. As the second night overtook him, he went further and deeper into the woods to spend the night. He lay down under a big tree and was soon fast asleep. Before daybreak he was awakened by a slap, and somebody called him with a loud voice. "Hey, there! Get up, little fellow! Why do you lie here? With whom are you here?" When Pasha arose, he was confronted by three fellows armed from head to foot. He was thoroughly frightened! "Be not afraid; we will not harm you. Tell us how you came here."

When Pasha saw that these men were not from the barracks, he told them freely what he had passed through and where he wanted to go. The men listened attentively; the clever and daring boy appealed to them. After a short consultation, they decided to take him along with them, "that he may not perish," they said. "This stripling can become somebody yet. He was not afraid to flee from the orphanage, and now he wants to undertake the long voyage to his home village all alone! We just have to raise him in *our style*."

The men told the boy of their decision, at the same time praising their manner of life, and promised him that he should fare very well with them. Pasha dared not contradict them, because he feared these armed men. He went with them into the interior of the woods, where in the clearing a strong young man waited for them with horses. The man grasped Pasha under the arms, lifting the boy in front of himself on the horse, and they galloped away. After riding a long time by winding paths in the forest, they finally stopped. The horses were taken away, while the men, dragging Pasha behind them, crawled through an opening under some trees broken down by a storm. After a few minutes' walk through thick woods they came upon a clearing where there were about twenty persons, mostly armed, including a few women. The eyes of all centered upon the boy, brought in as dirty and ragged as he was. They poured questions upon him; they wanted to know who he was and where he was from. One of the men, seemingly the leader of the band, asked, "What's your name?"

"Pasha; Paul!" answered the boy with a firm voice.

"What is your family name?"

"Tichomirow" (which means "quiet peace").

"That kind of a name does not fit among us; from now on you shall be called 'Greasy,' since you are so dirty and greasy," said the man. From that time he knew no other name than Greasy; the new name pleased them all very much.

Now it became clear to Pasha that he had landed in a robbers' den. By and by he became acquainted with the new life, eventually finding even a liking for it. The carefree liberty, the good food, the joyous and animated mood—all these worked to make him friendly to those people, and he ceased to think about Sosnovka. Only his sister Shura he could not forget; the thought of her often made him sad, as he assumed she was no longer alive.

The little "greasy" one soon became the darling of all the robbers and served all for a pastime. He became very much interested in their adventures and impatiently looked forward to their bringing in all new loot. Day by day he became familiar with the new life—and soon forgot what once his parents had taught him about the sin of stealing. It became even a pleasure to him to inspect the looted things and to listen to the tales of the robbers when they returned from their "work," as they were pleased to call their evil trade.

Eight Years Later

By the time eight years had passed, the then sixteen-year-old Greasy took a lively part in the robberies and plunderings of the band. Because of his bravery, cleverness, and capability, he soon became the helper of the leader. Their work terrorized the inhabitants in a circumference of seventy-five miles. The deep woods made it possible for the robbers to carry on their work without disturbances. It seemed as though nobody could find and put a halt to their activities. They robbed everybody who fell into their hands and not seldom committed murder.

But everything has its own time. One thing, a very simple case, brought about a complete change in the lives of the robbers. One part of the band, with Greasy as their leader, overtook two men passing through the woods. They robbed them and then killed them. The robbers took their horses, clothing, and boots for themselves, besides three rubles and fifty kopeken.¹

In one of these sacks, with all kinds of utensils, the robbers found two books. The men wanted to throw the books away, but on the spur of the moment they considered that it would be better to take them along for cigarette paper, so Greasy stuck the books among his things. In the evening, after looking once more over the stolen goods robbed during the day, he pulled out the books and began to leaf through them. One of the books had to him the unfamiliar title *The Voice of Faith*; the other was a New Testament. Concerning the latter he had a feeble recollection from childhood; his parents also used to have a New Testament in Sosnovka.

To pass away the time, while he was lying in his bunk, Greasy began to read the pages facing him at a chance opening of the book. There he read, "There is none that seeketh after God...Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom 3:11, 13-18). He considered, "Formerly there were also people as we are today—"Their feet are swift to shed blood." In his mind there appeared the picture of how they, the robbers, had on their quick horses pursued the fleeing travelers, and how, though the people pleaded for their lives, they had killed them without pity.

In remembering this, he considered further, "Who may those people have been? Why did they carry this book with them?" He began to leaf through the New Testament in the hope of finding some information about the murdered ones, but he found no document containing a clue as to who the slain ones were. He found only the following inscription on the fly-leaf: "May 15, 1898, the day of conversion to the Lord. On this day He forgave my sins and washed me with His holy blood."

Greasy did not understand the meaning of those words, and turning additional pages he read on: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1Co 6:9). He went on to read the various abominations that follow. He then read the summarizing words: "And such *were* some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1Co 6:11).

After this Greasy read the prayer of the man who said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luk 19:8). He turned a few leaves and was gripped by the reading of Luke 23, where the crucifixion of Jesus is depicted. It was of special interest to him that two murderers were crucified with the Christ, and that the one was forgiven by Jesus and promised entrance to paradise.

Greasy shut the book and lay it under his pillow. Rolling himself in his covers, he tried to sleep—but sleep left him. His heart was very much disturbed; all efforts to put away the thoughts crowding into his mind were useless. Over and over rose the picture of how the two travelers on their knees had pleaded to be spared.

Not until morning did deep sleep overcome Greasy, and he awoke with renewed unrest in his soul. His comrades noticed the strange expression on his face, but they did not know to what circumstance they should ascribe it. Some thought he had become sick. For a number of days he walked around in a daze, and nobody could get out of him what really was the matter. His comrades did not cease to try to find out the cause of his sadness, until he finally declared to some that he no longer could be at peace, since he had read something in the book that they had taken from the murdered ones. At this declaration all were overtaken with a strange feeling. What kind of book could it be that could bring about such a sad transformation of their jolly comrade?

The band of robbers then demanded that this book of witchcraft be surrendered and burned. Some, however, asked with interest that the book be given to them to look into. Finally it was decided that the book be read to the whole gang. When they were all together, Greasy read to them those parts which had moved him so greatly. They listened with strained attention. One young robber declared from the beginning with great certainty that the book was the New Testament and that he used to know it. "My mother was a stundist [believer]," he said, "and always read in the Gospels. She often took me to the children's meetings, where we read out of this book and sang and prayed."

¹ **three rubles and fifty kopeken** – the ruble is the current and historic currency of the Russia; the kopek is one one-hundredth of a ruble; three rubles fifty kopeken is worth approximately one eighth US Dollar or \$0.12.

For a long time the men sat listening to the reading of the book, and then they parted silently. Most of them were in a depressed mood. None of them could grasp the reason why the reading of the book should make such a strong impression on them. From that day the robbers came together from time to time to read the New Testament. The effect of the book was so powerful upon them that they could not withdraw from its influence.

A New Life

Thus a whole month passed. Then the young robber whose mother had been a “stundist,” declared to his comrades openly that he could no longer continue in the criminal trade. Greasy followed him. (The other robbers had already noted that both these young men prayed with tears in their eyes.) Eventually even the leader of the band followed their example.

Then arose the question, “What do we do now, and how do we start a new life?” They realized, first of all, that it would be necessary for them to yield themselves to the authorities. Since it was impossible for them to reimburse those whom they had damaged, there remained only one thing for them to do: turn themselves in! Although the majority did not agree to this plan, the young robber (who was the first to start the new life), Greasy, and five other men decided to acknowledge their whole guilt before the representatives of the law.

The day of separation came; the parting was touching. The comrades asked Greasy to read to them once more out of the New Testament. He opened to the place where the meeting of Jesus with the demon-possessed is described, and the Master’s power is depicted by the healing of the men and their subsequent loyalty to Him. “Thus it was with us also,” added Greasy. “We are about to quit our sinful lives. Let us cease to do evil to people and follow Christ!” After these words Greasy fell upon his knees and with a loud voice confessed his misdeeds. Others followed his example. Among the general crying and sighing, only scattered words and phrases could be distinguished—“Forgive me!” “Do not remember my...” “Wash me with Thy blood!” “Give me power!” “I shall no more...” “I promise...” Parting with a kiss from the others, the seven robbers, with their weapons in their hands, left for the nearest town, while the others disappeared in different directions.

Confession

With a decidedly firm step, Greasy and his comrades walked into the city. Immediately they drew the attention of the inhabitants. Who could imagine where this group of colorfully arrayed, armed men could have come from? At the corner of one of the main streets, they asked a policeman where the state attorney of the district court lived. The policeman pointed out a large two-story house in the same street, which the robbers entered. Previously they had agreed that Greasy, the most intelligent, should present their case to the district attorney.

The robbers entered a large, sunny room with hardwood floors, in which about twenty people were already gathered, waiting for the district attorney. At the door of the office stood an attendant of the court. Greasy turned to him with the following words: “Please tell the district attorney that we must speak with him without delay.” The employee looked suspiciously at the armed group and asked, “What case do you have to present?”

“It is something very important,” answered Greasy.

The employee disappeared behind the door. In a few minutes the robbers stood before a distinguished elderly gentleman, who seemed somewhat excited by the unexpected appearance of seven armed men. The robbers, even though they had determined before leaving the backwoods to take the unusual step of free confession, were also noticeably stirred when they stood face-to-face with the representative of the law. “Permit us to explain to you who we are and why we have come to this place,” began Greasy with a trembling voice. “We are robbers, but you need not fear us; we have come to confess our whole guilt to you and take the consequences. We have realized what a great injustice we have done, and are here now to suffer the punishment meted out by the law for robbery. Do with us as justice demands. Here are our weapons; take them.” With these words Greasy and his fellows quickly laid down their weapons in a heap.

The district attorney became completely confused and could not immediately control himself. It was the first time in his life that he had witnessed the confession of a whole group of men, who yielded themselves voluntarily into the hands of the representatives of the law. After some time he called the police; in a few minutes a small detachment of armed soldiers led by a police captain appeared. The necessary notes of the case were taken and turned over to the department of investigation. As Greasy, in the course of the examination, pictured the story of his life in general terms, and spoke of the reason that he and his companions forsook the robber’s life in the forest, the district attorney and all present were visibly moved. Only with effort could they hide their tears. It was difficult for them to believe that the thorough change in these robbers was due solely to their acquaintance with the Gospel. “I would like no longer to be called Greasy, but instead Paul Tichomirow,” said the youth. “I will hereafter serve God and mankind and without murmuring take upon myself the punishment determined by the law. We are now in your hands.” All his comrades agreed with this declaration.

Quite excited, the district attorney commanded that the seven criminals be carried into the jail to be kept in separate cells until the investigation be finished. Thereupon the former robbers were led away. The district attorney remained alone

with the police captain in the office. For a long time they discussed together this extraordinary happening. They knew that ordinarily criminals denied their guilt, or admitted it only under the pressure of undeniable evidence or if they were caught in the deed. These men, however, came of their own free will and confessed all. How great must be the power of the Gospel to change the men in this manner!

Jurij Nikolajewitch

After the police captain had gone and the district attorney had concluded his office hours, the latter told his wife the experience with the robbers. Her surprise was also great, and after some consideration she said, "One of the robbers that was crucified with Christ turned also, but he could not run away. These men, however, did not need to come; they could have carried on their business and kept hiding in the woods. It is surprising—an unknown case in the history of justice!"

By nightfall the district attorney and his wife were not yet calmed. "What do you think, Tanja [a pet name for Tatjana]?" he said. "*Should we not read the New Testament also?* Perhaps we could find what could have worked so upon these men. We hardly know the book."

"I have read it already," said Tatjana Alexandrown disdainfully. "I cannot understand what could be in it to have worked so upon those robbers."

The district attorney, Jurij Nikolajewitch, rose and went into the library to look for a New Testament, while his wife hurried to the kitchen to give orders for supper. Jurij Nikolajewitch put on his spectacles, opened the New Testament, and began to turn the leaves in it. His attention was drawn to John 12, and he began to read. While reading, he agreed with the action of Mary, who spent the valuable ointment on Christ. At the same time, from the standpoint of a jurist, he could not help condemning the secret thief Judas—in his mind he viewed the traitor's evil deeds in the light of the pertaining paragraphs of the law. The attorney continued to read; he was astonished at the omnipotence of Christ by which He raised Lazarus, whose body was already decomposing. He marveled at the unbelief of the scribes, who were the eyewitnesses of these unheard-of wonders. He thoughtfully considered the grain of wheat that must first die before it can bear fruit, yet he could not grasp the real meaning of the parable.

However, when he came to the words, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Joh 12:32), he felt suddenly as if the crucified One had come near. He felt a glow in his soul and a longing after the Cross from which once the great words sounded, "It is finished!" (Joh 19:30). He wondered if that could have been the power which had drawn Tichomirow, but a certain dread overcame him as he read at the end of the chapter the words, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (12:48). Then it was clear to him the reason that the robbers left their nefarious business.

At this time his wife came from the kitchen. "What are you thinking? What has stirred you up so greatly?" she asked her husband. Jurij Nikolajewitch began to explain, but he could not put the proper words to the unusual theme, and she could not understand him.

That night Jurij Nikolajewitch could not sleep. As soon as he closed his eyes, he heard the words, "My word will judge..." It seemed to him the paragraphs of the law of God were condemning him, the district attorney, for all the misdeeds committed in his life, and he was seeking and calling for some advocate, but could find none. At last he fell into a short slumber, but even then he could find no rest. In the morning he related to his wife what he had passed through during the night. She ascribed his condition to his strenuous service and nervous state, but when he declared his determination to give up his position, she was shocked and feared that he was losing his reason. Jurij Nikolajewitch, however, remained firm in his determination. It was evident to him that the Son of God lifted upon the Cross was drawing him, the district attorney, to Himself in order that He might be his personal Saviour.

Paul Tichomirow and his comrades were put in separate cells. All the judges who participated in the examination and heard the robbers wondered at the step that they had taken, and were especially surprised over the fact that these men were changed only through the influence of the Gospel. Thus the great power of God's Book is manifested to whosoever draws nigh with a simple heart and a real desire to know the truth. The turning of the robbers, the sudden, inexplicable resignation of the district attorney, and the demand of the priest that the former criminals be isolated under the assertion that Tichomirow and his comrades were misleading the other prisoners to the acceptance of their faith—all these occurrences soon were the talk of the town. The fire of the Gospel sprang up in every cell. Many of the prisoners and even some of the guards memorized almost all of the twelfth and sixteenth chapters of the Acts of the Apostles because they were so greatly impressed by them.

The Trial and Its Aftermath

A year later the seven robbers stood before the judgment bar. Because of the men's open confession, the district attorney did not need to emphasize their guilt; the old district attorney, as the criminals' representative, pleaded for mercy since the

men had made an open confession and wanted to live an honest life. Nevertheless, the men were condemned to ten years of compulsory labor. Humbly they accepted the judgment, realizing that they deserved it; consequently, they did not appeal for mitigation. The trial was public. When the accused were permitted to speak the last word, each of them in simple expressions voiced his regret for having wronged others for so many years, and each told of the effect of the Gospel in his inner life. Many of the listeners were touched; the seed of the Word of God began to take root in numerous hearts.

After the end of the trial, the condemned were sent away singly to various destinations, with the exception of Tichomirow and Solowjew, who went to the same place. At the parting, they promised one another to remain, under all conditions, honest and true to the Lord and to tell others of His love. Tichomirow and Solowjew were sent to the district beyond the Baikal Sea. In all the transfer prisons that they had to pass through on their way, they related their salvation through the Gospel and the love of God to every sinner. Everywhere they found some who would listen to their simple testimony and consider it in their heart.

Among those under compulsory labor, whose lot they now had to share, the two men found especially attentive listeners to the living Word. After some time several surrendered fully to the Lord. Within two years even the prison management noticed that the usually unruly convicts had become quiet, and that the behavior of some had become faultless.

A Journey

On the way to exile, Tichomirow sought everywhere some sign of the immigrants of the government of Mogilew, hoping to find out something about his countrymen, and particularly whether his sister was still alive. All the letters that he had sent to his home town had remained unanswered. How often his thoughts returned to his beloved sister. How he would have liked to tell her of all his experiences, and his conversion from the works of death into the living hope in Christ.

After several years, on account of some joyful national happening, an amnesty was granted, giving Paul Tichomirow and George Solowjew their liberty. Taking leave of those convicts who had been converted, they commended their spiritual children to God. All cried at the parting.

Tichomirow and Solowjew began their way on foot in the direction of Irkutsk-Tomsk. Their most ardent desire was to succeed in getting into European Russia to their homes, of which they still had feeble recollections. Everyone whom they met on their wanderings or in the lodgings took an interest in them and asked who they were, where they had come from, and where they were going. All were deeply moved by the life story of the former robbers, and in the hearts of many the desire was awakened to serve the Lord also. In many of the colonies they found believing brethren, with whom they spent the evenings in brotherly discussions and the reading of the Word of God. The believers rejoiced in the triumph of the Gospel manifested in the conversion of the lost sinners and glorified the name of the Lord. In one of the settlements where they spent Sunday and testified to a large congregation concerning their former life and their conversion, a great awakening started; a good number of souls turned to the Lord. This brought great joy to all.

In the first days of spring, when all nature was coming to new life after winter's long sleep, the migratory birds flew in large flocks toward their old homes, where in the fall they had left their nests behind. Tichomirow and Solowjew also hastened toward their home town, where, however, their houses had been destroyed long ago. In their wanderings, they kept close to the railroad. Vainly Tichomirow tried to remember the name of the station where he had lost his parents and his sister. He would have liked to see once more the pile of snow fences in whose shadow he had passed through so much sorrow and hardship in his childhood. As he remembered his experience, tears ran down his cheeks, and he exclaimed, "Oh, my beloved ones, you have all forsaken me, and now I have to wander about alone in this wide world!" But then he remembered that neither had the Son of God a place of refuge on this earth—even among His own He was quite alone.

Mr. and Mrs. Wasiljewitch

Toward the close of the day the wanderers drew nigh to a small town situated on the banks of a river not far from the railroad. Turning into one of the streets, they asked the people, "Are there any believers?" A neat little house among the tall pines was pointed out to them. Nearing the place, they noticed two children playing at the door of the house and in the yard a young, well-dressed lady, who was quite busy. She greeted them kindly, however. The men told her that they were believers and asked for lodging. The young woman led them graciously into the house, saying, "For the brethren in the Lord there will always be a place."

At that time she called her husband, who was working in the garden. He came at once, greeted the guests cordially, and conversed with them while his wife hastened to prepare the tea. Before the water in the samovar [Russian teakettle] came to a boil, she had milked two cows and set the table. What a feast: large pieces of fresh butter, cream, a large pitcher of rich milk, two or three kinds of cake, boiled eggs, and wonderful white bread. It was quite a sight for the eyes of the hungry wanderers. The large lamp threw a bright light on the snow-white tablecloth, and the shining samovar hummed cheerfully.

The friendly lady of the house entered in her white embroidered apron and said to her husband, "Ask the brethren to come to the table." They sat down to the well-laden table, and the head of the home asked the blessing. He thanked the Lord for His love and care and for the guests, and asked Him to keep them in faith and bless the food. It was the first time in his life that Tichomirow had sat down to such a richly laden table amid so hospitable and kind a family. His heart overflowed with joy and delight. The children, a boy and a girl, also occupied places at the table and listened attentively to the conversation.

Tichomirow, at the call to supper, had to stop relating the story of his experience at the point where the robbers in the thick woods began to read the New Testament that they had taken off the persons of the murdered travelers. At the request of the head of the house, Tichomirow continued his story. In vivid words he pictured how the Gospel entered into his own and his comrade's heart, how they regretted their evil deeds and decided to change their way of living and deliver themselves to justice, how the district attorney was converted, and how they were sentenced. Further he told them of his stay in the transfer prisons and of the years he spent in compulsory work until he received amnesty. The hosts could not take their eyes from the narrator, and the lady of the house often wiped the flowing tears from her cheeks, as if she wanted to hide them from the others.

During this narration the time passed unnoticed until the large clock loudly announced the midnight hour; then they all knelt and thanked God for His wonderful grace in the salvation of the lost sinners. When the lady of the house arose, greatly moved, she said, "But where do you want to go now?"

"We have determined to return to our former homes," answered Tichomirow.

"Do you still have relatives there?" she continued.

"Solowjew still has a mother, who is a believer and lives in the government of Kiev. I have nobody—neither father nor mother. I am simply going to look up my childhood place, my home village in the government of Mogilew. First of all, however, I have the great desire to tell my countrymen of Christ and His love for them."

"Are you an orphan a long time already?" resumed the hostess.

"I lost my parents when I was eight years old; I lost them in Siberia on our migration trip. My father died two days before the passing away of my mother."

The lady grabbed the table with both hands and stood leaning forward, looking Tichomirow deep in the eyes. Her husband looked at her, surprised, and could not understand the reason she questioned the guest so thoroughly instead of preparing the beds for the night. Tichomirow continued. "We—my sister and I—remained as orphans; she was somewhat older than I. The day after the death of our mother I lost her out of sight. Up to this moment I do not know what has become of her. Surely she must have perished like so many orphan children of the immigrants, on account of the impossible living conditions. She was a good girl and cared for me as my own mother." At this point Tichomirow began to cry.

Pale as death, with tears streaming down her face, the hostess exclaimed, "Is it possible that it is you, my beloved brother, Pasha? Tell me quickly; my heart tells me it is you."

"Shura! Do my eyes really see you? You, my angel, my beloved!" he cried, weeping like a child.

"Yes, it is I; I am your sister; you, my beloved! How my heart cried out for you!" The brother and sister threw themselves into each other's arms, kissing and weeping. Then Tichomirow reached out for the children, who, crying, looked at the mother. Presently he kissed the children and the husband of his sister.

Even Solowjew took part in the general joy and was greatly touched by the unexpected reunion of the brother and sister. Oh, what joy there was! Shura was so excited that she did not know what to do first. Again and again she drew near to Pasha, put her arms around him, and said, "Is it truly you, my brother? Do I really see you? Oh, what joy! As you neared our house I had the impression of having found something valuable; my heart was full with an unspeakable joy. I did not know how it came. I was prepared at once to offer you refreshment and lodging. After all the distress that I have experienced, I am ready to help other needy ones also, but in this case my heart yearned especially to do so. Now I know why. It was my beloved brother who came to me; for twenty years we have not seen each other. What a joy!"

Again they fell on their knees and praised God with such a fervency as never before. Even the five-year-old daughter of Shura prayed, "Dear Savior, I thank Thee that Thou hast brought Uncle Pasha to us!" They all cried, and Alexej Wasiljewitch thanked God for the valuable gift that God had granted to his wife.

It was already three o'clock in the morning, but they had not slept; even the children had not lain down. Once more they drank tea, conversing together. Finally just before daybreak they went to bed, having commended themselves to the care of God. On account of their recent experiences the sleep of all was restless. Pasha dreamed of how he had read the Gospel to his robber pals in the woods and of how he had parted from them. He dreamed of the district attorney, the court, the transfer prisoners, and the compulsory labor. When he awoke and convinced himself that he had only been dreaming, he thanked the Lord anew for what He had done. At the breakfast tea, he again expressed the same astonishment and admiration at the wonderful grace of God in caring for orphans.

Shura asked her brother to repeat his experiences from the time of the parting at the snow fences at the railroad station. She herself had suffered much in the barracks for the girls and had remained there until late fall. With the beginning of autumn, since the barracks were not heated, an epidemic had set in and the children had died by the dozen. Then the good people from the surrounding villages had come and taken the children with them to save the little ones from freezing. Shura had been taken by a poor but believing widow who had four children of her own. In a small hut where the flat roof was covered with turf, Shura had spent the winter with Aunt Dunja (a pet name for Eudoxia); there she had had enough bread. Aunt Dunja used to read the New Testament and pray with the children. In this colony was also a school which Shura had attended; she studied diligently. She enjoyed reading very much and especially liked to read in the New Testament. At the age of fourteen she had experienced the grace and knowledge of salvation and requested baptism, through which she had received the fellowship of believers.

Four more years passed. Shura had grown up to young womanhood. She was known as a diligent worker and was the best singer in the choir. Everybody loved her. It would not have entered anybody's mind that she was not the daughter of Aunt Dunja. They loved each other very much. The choir of the village had often visited the neighboring villages and towns to witness for the Lord. Once the singers had decided to visit the town where Shura now lived. There the Lord had blessed their service richly. Under the influence of the spiritual messages of the preacher, who had come with the choir, and under the effort of the wonderful singing, a number of people had turned to the Lord, among them a young bookkeeper who was employed in a business house. Within a year he had become the husband of Shura, and they had since lived together in love and harmony. They were blessed with two children.

When Shura had finished her story she reminded Pasha of how he would have thrown himself under the train after the death of the parents and of how she prevailed upon him not to take the desperate step, saying, "Despair not, my beloved; God will not forsake us." Now Pasha and Shura were constrained to think of the words of the Psalmist. "Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Psa 68:4-6). At this they praised God anew.

Trip to Sosnovka

Shura agreed with the intention of her brother to return to the old home to call the relatives and acquaintances to Christ, and she was also desirous of accompanying him on the trip and helping him in the work with unsaved souls. Alexej Wasiljewitch heartily agreed with the plan and promised to watch over the boy, while Shura was to take the girl along. He also gave the necessary money for the journey.

Three days later the brother and sister were on their way toward European Russia. With Solowjew, they passed through Samara, Saratow, Pensa, Woronesh, Kursk, and Kiev. In this last city, Solowjew parted with Pasha and Shura to go to his home village, in the hope of returning to them after having seen his mother. The brother and sister continued their journey to the government of Mogilew, to reach finally their home place of Sosnovka.

Upon arriving there and inquiring about the family of Tichomirow, they found two brothers of their father, two aunts, and some distant relatives still living. All were surprised at the appearance of Pasha and Shura, whom they had heard perished after the death of their parents before reaching their destination. Everybody invited them as welcome guests.

Soon they learned that their young relatives were evangelists who refused to celebrate the joy of meeting again by drinking because it was not becoming to Christians. "But why not?" asked the inhabitants of the village. "Are we not also Christians? Yet we drink liquor at every opportunity." Such questions usually started a discussion which later turned to the reading of God's Word. Pasha's narration of how he came to the new life made a great impression upon all. Almost every evening the inhabitants of Sosnovka gathered at Tichomirow's home to hear the Word of God. Very gradually the truth of the Gospel broke down the barriers of the old prejudices of their purely outward form of religion. Many found Christ as their personal Saviour and decided to devote their lives to Him wholly.

New Testing

Then came a new testing time. The priests were stirred up and aroused the police of the whole district, insisting that the convict had come and ruined the foundation of the orthodox faith of the people—and that if the authorities did not capture him, even the foundations of the state would be endangered by the new teaching. At night a policeman appeared in the dwelling of the Tichomirows and led Paul to the president of the country police, where the next morning the examining magistrate and the priest appeared. After the investigation, a bill charging seduction was filed. While awaiting the court trial, Tichomirow was taken to the country prison under police guard.

Shura sorrowed very much for her brother. She had to return to Siberia without being able to see him again, because visiting the arrested ones was forbidden before the trial. After a few days, Pasha wrote the following letter to his sister:

“My dear sister Shura, I beg you not to be sorrowful about me. I am very glad to be in the prison no longer as a thief and robber, but as a Christian to take part in the sufferings of my Saviour. I rejoice therein indescribably, because in the prison many lost souls thirst after salvation, to whom I am permitted to bring Christ. Be not dismayed, but pray for me. I greet you and your husband and children with a kiss.” A whole year passed before the court trial; by that time Paul had been in three prisons. Everywhere he preached Christ, and everywhere the sinners decided to follow the way of salvation. The prison chaplains, however, asked the authorities to deliver them from this heretic with whom they could not live peaceably. The court condemned Tichomirow to banishment for two years in the government of Jenisejek on the charge of seduction of the orthodox believers to “stundism” (Gospel belief). Investigation brought to light that in Sosnovka alone about a hundred ceased to go to the priest and to worship holy pictures.

Soon after his condemnation, Paul was carried again, by the way of the transport prisons, to the country so well known to him—Siberia. He succeeded in notifying Shura and her husband of the train in which he would pass the nearest railroad station, and they went there to see him once more. They were permitted only to greet him through the bars of the prison wagons. Shura cried because she felt sorry for her brother, but he looked at her, smiling, and let her know thereby that he was glad to be permitted to suffer for Christ’s sake.

Two years passed. The life of Tichomirow during this banishment reflected everywhere that pure and holy life of Christ, which was the cause of the success of his testimony. During those two years he was in continual communication by letter with Shura and also with Solowjew. The latter informed him that he remained in his native village, where a small group of Gospel Christians gave him a brotherly welcome, and that he was permitted to work among them with a great blessing. His mother was still alive and very happy because God had answered her prayers and saved her son. She was concluding the last days of her life with her son, who was now an honest and chaste Christian.

Life of Service

After finishing the time of his banishment, Pasha went to his sister fully determined to devote his whole life to the salvation of lost sinners. He would not be bound in marriage because he wanted nothing to hinder him in the proclamation of that Gospel that had changed him and many others completely. He worked in the congregation of that town in which Shura lived and also in other towns in Siberia, but his permanent dwelling was with his sister, to the joy of his brother-in-law also. Shura often accompanied her brother on his trips into the villages as his co-worker in the vineyard of the Lord. The spiritual life of the congregation progressed.

Paul Tichomirow wrote the following words on the first page of the New Testament that he had taken from the brother whom he slew: “Forgive me for Christ’s sake, beloved brother. I put you to death while I myself was dead in my sins. The Lord hath forgiven me and raised me to a new life. Thy untimely bodily death was the means of leading not only me, but also many other sinners and murderers to eternal life. Thy New Testament softened my hard heart as a living stream, stilled my thirst, and continues to flow further, quickening and giving life to other souls also. For this I praise thy and my God. Amen!” ❧

In thankfulness for blessing obtained by the reading of this life story, the effort has been made by the means of this translation to enable others to be partakers of the blessing that comes from a sincere and serious acceptance of the Word of God. It is recommended by repeated reading not only to gain more thorough knowledge concerning the incidents described, but also a more correct appreciation of one’s own condition as it is in the sight of God. This effort is made with prayer that the reader may search his own heart to see if he can measure up to the standard of God.

