

“GREASY” The Robber.....continued: Part 2.

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, endeavouring 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.

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?”

“Tichomirov” (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.

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.

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” (Romans 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 travellers, and how, though the people pleaded for their lives, they had killed them without pity.

In remembering this, a strange feeling came over Greasy, and 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 flyleaf: “May 15, 1898, the day of conversion to the Lord, my repentance and new birth. 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?” (1 Corinthians 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" (1 Corinthians 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" (Luke 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 who repented and confessed his sins 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, and efforts to put away the thoughts crowding into his mind were useless. Over and over rose the picture of how the two travellers 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."

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.

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!"

TO BE CONTINUED.