

“GREASY” The Robber.....continued: Part 3.

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.

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 colourfully 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 Tichomirov,” 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 extra ordinary 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!

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 Alexandrov disdainfully. “I cannot understand what could be in it to have worked so upon those robbers.”

The district attorney; Jurij Nikolajevitch, 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 Nikolajevitch 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 marvelled 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” (John 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!” He wondered if that could have been the power which had drawn Tichomirov, 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” (verse 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 Nikolajevitch began to explain, but he could not put the proper words to the unusual theme, and she could not understand him.

That night Jurij Nikolajevitch 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 Nikolajevitch, 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 Tichomirov 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 Tichomirov 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.

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 labour. 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 Tichomirov and Solojev, 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. Tichomirov and

Solojev 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 repentant 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.

On the way to exile, Tichomirov sought everywhere some sign of the immigrants of the government of Mogilev, 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 Tichomirov and George Solojev their liberty. Taking leave of those convicts who had been converted, they commended their spiritual children to God.

All cried at the parting. Tichomirov and Solojev 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. Tichomirov and Solojev 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 Tichomirov 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.

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.

TO BE CONTINUED.