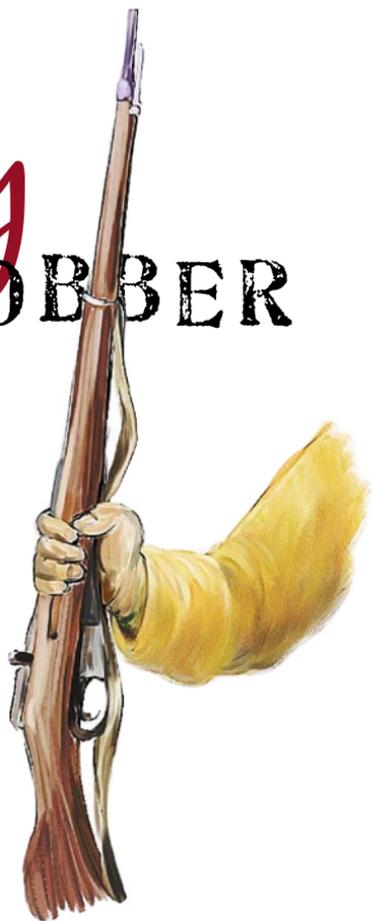


Greasy THE ROBBER



**A True Story
Demonstrating the
Power of the Gospel**

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GREASY THE ROBBER
Author Unknown
translated from German by
Charles Lukesh

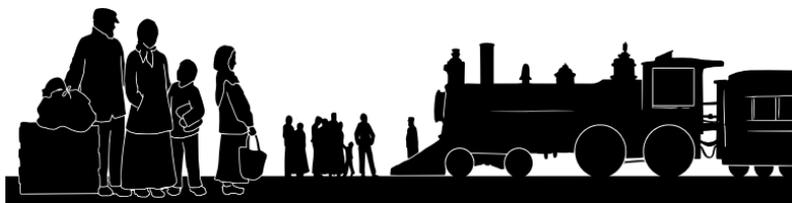


published by
Timeless Truths Publications
PO Box 1212
Jefferson, OR 97352
www.timelesstruths.org

December 2010
May 2013
December 2013

*Scripture quotations are taken from the
King James Version*

also available in audio



*He fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said,
It is better for me to die than to live.*

—JONAH 4:8

Immigrants

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 *Tikhomirov*.¹ He was the son of a farmer from one of the poorest villages in the Government of *Mogilev*. The family consisted of the father, the mother, and two children—ten-year-old *Shura* 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 “*Duratchki*,” 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*,” used to say, “It is no

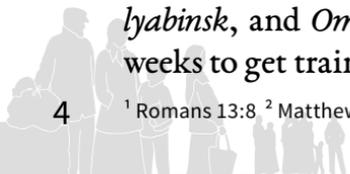
¹ See Glossary on page 48 for pronunciations and definitions of italicized words.

sin to drink with moderation. Even the Lord Jesus loved to be joyful, and at the wedding in Cana changed water into wine.”

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 drinking the liquor or from the frequent hits with the pack of cards thrown at him cleverly by their 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 any thing,’¹ and, ‘With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.’”²

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, Tikhomirov was among those landseekers. 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. This was in the year 1897.

During the trip, the trains made slow headway and had to make long stopovers at the crossroads in *Samara*, *Che-lyabinsk*, and *Omsk*. The moving farmers had to wait for weeks to get trains for further travel. Their days and nights

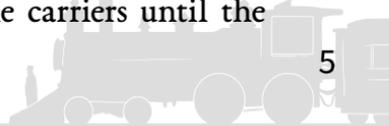


were spent in the small railroad stations, sleeping on the floor. The boiled water was not sufficient for all, nor could the people afford to buy warm food from the restaurants. Consequently, the poor, simple people satisfied themselves with dried herring or other dried fish and drank unboiled water. As a result, many had stomach trouble, and cholera set in. The older people were especially afflicted by the plague.

On the last stretch before reaching Tomsk, Mr. Tikhomirov became sick. All indications signified cholera. To the horror of his wife and children, at one of the stations he was taken from the train and put in the barracks for people with infectious diseases. It was only natural that Mrs. Tikhomirov 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 report was worse every time.

After three days had passed, the sorrow-stricken mother had to tell the children that she also 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 her was the possibility that her beloved children soon would be orphans in a strange land.

As the mother was carried into the barracks, the desperate children ran crying behind the carriers until the





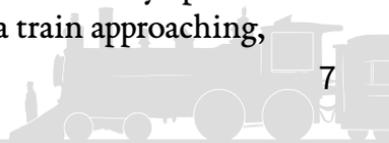
heavy barracks door was slammed in their faces. How lonesome and miserable Shura and Pasha felt. As if bereft of their senses, they circled the barracks, calling now for their father and then for their mother. The only answer they received was a coarse cry from the guard, threatening them with a whipping 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 back to the spot where they had been camping, they found no sign of their baggage. Apparently someone had taken the few poor things of the immigrants.

Crawling behind the snow fences, the two children huddled together to keep warm. Shura was very concerned about her younger brother. During the night, which seemed to her like an eternity, she did not close her eyes. As soon as Pasha awoke the next day, the children hurried back 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.”

But it was impossible to compel the children to leave the barracks. Again and again they looked through the windows and called for their mother. Would her beloved voice be silenced forever? Would she be only a cold corpse in the morning? Yes, that evening they were told that their 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 a train approaching,



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 clasped 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 argued, 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.” 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 harshly, “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 two children returned to the snow fences—the silent witnesses of their cruel experiences of the last five days, including the parting from their beloved mother. This place had become the orphaned children’s home. Under the protection of these fences they began to consider what to do next.

The very thought of being put into the barracks for orphans seemed terrible to them; yet they realized that it would save them from starvation. Hunger was becoming more and more intense. Their meager supply of food, as well as their money, had been stolen along 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, saying, “We shall not despair, my beloved; God will not forsake us.”



The children decided to follow the railroad to the next village to beg a bite of bread, but just then 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 away. 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.





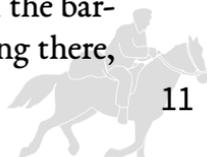
*My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not....
For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.*

—PROVERBS 1:10,16

A Robber

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, being accustomed to the environment. The newcomer was greeted by the boys with coarse jokes, shoves, and pushes. Within a week Pasha entertained only one thought: 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.

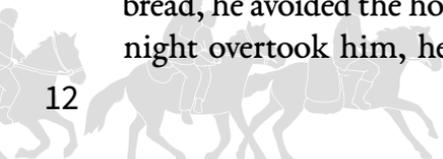
The boys were forbidden to leave the barracks without being accompanied, but Pasha was determined to get away. One night, he went out in the dark, climbed over a low place in the board enclosure, and ran as if pursued in the direction opposite from the railroad. About four miles from the barracks was the beginning of a large forest. On arriving there,



Pasha felt somewhat calmer. He ran no more, but walked on, endeavoring to keep near 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. In his sleep 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 swum and caught fish with the other children. He would like very much to have seen his beloved sister before starting back, but where or how could he find her? Besides, it terrified him to think that he might be found and brought back to the boys' barracks. Therefore, he bravely decided to go on so that he would soon be far from that 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 a loud voice said, “Hey, there! Get up, little fellow! Why do you lie here? With whom are you here?” Pasha rose up, and found himself 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; this 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 trip to his home village all alone! We will 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 farther into the woods, where in a clearing a strong young man waited for them with horses. This man grasped Pasha under the arms, lifted the boy onto the horse in front of himself, 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 which had been broken down by a storm. After a few minutes' walk through thick woods they came upon a clearing where there were about twenty people, 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—who was he and where was he from? One of the men, seemingly the leader of the band, asked, “What’s your name?”

“Pasha!” answered the boy with a firm voice.

“What is your family name?”

“Tikhomirov.”¹

“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 even finding 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

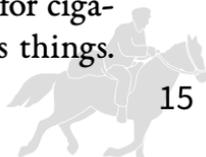
looked forward to their bringing in all new loot. He soon forgot what once his parents had taught him about the sin of stealing. It became even a pleasure to him to inspect the looted things and to listen to the tales of the robbers when they returned from their “work,” as they were pleased to call their evil trade.

By the time eight years had passed, the then sixteen-year-old Greasy was taking 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 being disturbed. 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 *kopeks*.¹

In one of the sacks, along 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 to use for cigarette paper, so Greasy stuck the books among his things.

¹ Approximately an average worker's daily wage.





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 understandeth, 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.”¹ 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 travelers pled for their lives, they had been killed 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?”² He went on to read the various abominations that follow.

¹ Romans 3:11, 13-18 ² 1 Corinthians 6:9 ² 6:11 ³ Luke 19:8



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

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.”² 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 robbers 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 would not come. His heart was very much disturbed; all efforts to put away the thoughts crowding into his mind were useless. Over and over again rose the picture of how the two travelers on their knees had pled to be spared.

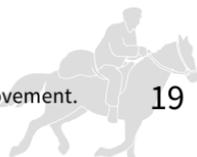
Not until morning did deep sleep overcome Greasy, and when he awoke, it was with renewed unrest in his soul. His comrades noticed the strange expression on his face, but they did not know what could have caused it. Some thought he had become sick. For a number of days he walked around in a daze, and nobody could get out of him what was really the matter. His comrades kept trying to find out the cause of his sadness, until he finally declared 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 should 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*,¹” 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.

¹ A term used to describe members of a Russian Protestant evangelical movement.





*Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken:
but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

—MATTHEW 21:44

Broken

Thus a whole month passed. At last 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 agreed with 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, as well as 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.

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.

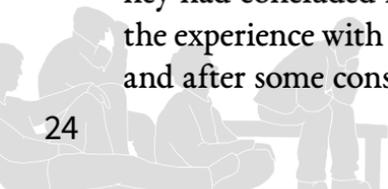
“Permit us to explain to you who we are and why we have come to this place,” began Greasy with a trembling voice. “We are robbers, but you need not fear us; we have come to confess our whole guilt to you and take the consequences. We have realized what a great injustice we have done and are here now 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 Tikhomirov," 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!

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 repented 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, *Tanya*¹?” 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 *Tatiana* disdainfully. “I cannot understand what could be in it to have worked so upon those robbers.”

The district attorney, *Yuri Nikolaievitch*, rose and went into the library to look for a New Testament while his wife hurried to the kitchen to give orders for supper. Yuri 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. And, 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

¹ A pet name for Tatiana.

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,”¹ 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!”² He wondered if that could have been the power which had drawn Tikhomirov, 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.”³ Then it was clear to him the reason why the robbers had 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. Yuri began to explain, but he could not put the proper words to this unusual theme, and she could not understand him.

That night Yuri 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. Yuri Nikolaievitch, 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 Savior.

Paul Tikhomirov and his comrades were put in separate cells. All the judges who participated in the examination and heard the robbers marveled 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 near 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 Tikhomirov 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 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 Tikhomirov and one by the name of George *Solovyov*, who went to the same place. At the parting, they all promised one another to remain, under all conditions, honest and true to the Lord, and to tell others of His love. Tikhomirov and Solovyov were sent to the district beyond Lake *Baikal*. 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 his way into exile, Tikhomirov sought everywhere some sign of the immigrants from 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.





As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.

—PROVERBS 25:25

Reunion

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

Tikhomirov and Solovyov 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 old 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. Tikhomirov and Solovyov 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 Tikhomirov 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 near 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 here?" 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.”

She then 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*¹ 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 a 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 Tikhomirov 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, were also at the table and listened attentively to the conversation.

Tikhomirov, 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 from the murdered travelers. At the request of the head of the house, Tikhomirov continued his story. In vivid words he pictured how the gospel entered into his own and his comrade's hearts; 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 Tikhomirov.

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

"Solovyov 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 *Mogilev*. 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 Tikhomirov 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.

Tikhomirov 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 Tikhomirov 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 Tikhomirov reached out for the children, who, crying, looked at the mother. Presently he kissed the children and the husband of his sister.

Even Solovyov 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 *Alexey Vasilievitch* thanked God for the precious gift that had been granted to his wife.

It was already three o'clock in the morning, but they could not sleep; 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, and then she related her own story. She had suffered much in the barracks for the girls, remaining 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 *Dunya*¹; there she had had enough bread.

Aunt Dunya used to read the New Testament and pray with the children. In this colony was also a school which Shura had attended, and 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 anyone's mind that she was not the daughter of Aunt Dunya. They loved each other very much.

The choir of the village 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.

¹ A pet name for Eudoxia.

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. They had since lived together in love and harmony, and were now 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 their 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.”¹ At this they praised God anew.





*Whereof I... am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you,
and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh
for his body's sake, which is the church.*

—COLOSSIANS I:23-24

For Christ's Sake

Shura agreed with her brother's intention to return to the old home to call their relatives and acquaintances to Christ, and she desired also to accompany him on the trip and help him in the work with unsaved souls. Her husband Alexey heartily agreed with the plan and promised to care for their son, while Shura was to take their daughter along. He also provided the necessary money for the journey.

Three days later the brother and sister were on their way toward European Russia. With Solovyov, they passed through Samara, *Saratov*, *Penza*, *Voronezh*, *Kursk*, and then Kiev. There Solovyov parted from them to go to his home village, with the hope of rejoining them after having seen his mother. Pasha and Shura continued their journey to the Government of Mogilev to reach finally their childhood home of Sosnovka.

Upon arriving there and inquiring about the family of Tikhomirov, they found two brothers of their father, two

aunts, and some distant relatives still living. All were astonished at the appearance of Pasha and Shura, who had been reported as having 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 telling of how he came to the new life made a great impression upon all. Almost every evening the inhabitants of Sosnovka gathered at Tikhomirov's 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 Savior and decided to devote their lives to Him wholly.

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 Tikhomirovs and led Paul to the chief of the country police, where the next morning the examining magistrate and the priest appeared.

After the investigation, a bill charging religious seduction was filed. While awaiting the court trial, Tikhomirov 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 her a letter:

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 Savior. 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 lost 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 Tikhomirov to banishment for two years in the Government of *Yeniseysk* on the charge of religious seduction of the orthodox believers to “Stundism.” Investigation brought to



light that in Sosnovka alone about a hundred ceased to go to the priest and to worship holy images.

Soon after his sentencing Paul was sent 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 more years passed. The life of Tikhomirov during this banishment reflected everywhere that pure and holy life of Christ, which was the cause of his successful testimony. During those two years he was in continual communication by letter with Shura and also with Solovyov. The latter wrote that he had remained in his native village, where a small group of gospel Christians had given 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 him, who was now an honest and chaste Christian.

After finishing the time of his exile, Pasha returned 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 so completely changed him and many others. He labored also in other towns and congregations in Siberia, but his permanent dwelling was with his sister and brother-in-law, to their great joy. Shura often accompanied her brother on his travels as his co-worker in the vineyard of the Lord. Thus the spiritual life of the congregation increased by the hand of God.

* * *

Paul Tikhomirov 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!

O Thou Who hears when sinners cry,
Though all my crimes before Thee lie,
Behold them not with angry look,
But blot their mem'ry from Thy book.

A broken heart, my God, my King,
Is all the sacrifice I bring;
The God of grace will ne'er despise
A broken heart for sacrifice.

My soul lies humbled in the dust,
And owns Thy dreadful sentence just:
Look down, O Lord, with pitying eye,
And save the soul condemned to die.

Create my nature pure within,
And form my soul averse to sin:
Let Thy good Spirit ne'er depart,
Nor hide Thy presence from my heart.

Then will I teach the world Thy ways;
Sinners shall learn Thy sov'reign grace;
I'll lead them to my Savior's blood,
And they shall praise a pard'ning God.

O may Thy love inspire my tongue!
Salvation shall be all my song;
And all my pow'rs shall join to bless
The Lord, my strength and righteousness.

—*Isaac Watts*

Translator's Note

This story of a former penitentiary inmate was translated from the German after being translated from the Russian. The original translators stressed their endeavor to maintain the simplicity of the author; similarly we pass it on in the English translation in the hope that it may be a blessing to many that read it. The story proves the words of scripture: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! ...to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. II:33,36).

In thankfulness for blessing obtained by the reading of this life story, this translation has been made to enable others to be partakers of the blessing that comes from a sincere and serious acceptance of the Word of God. It is our prayer that the reader may search his own heart to see if he is measured up to the standard of God.

—*Charles Lukesh*

About the Translator

Charles Lukesh was a missionary of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Chile, South America, before his transfer to his native country, Czechoslovakia, in connection with the American-European Fellowship. His wide ministry there was stopped in the sixteenth year with the occupation by the Nazi forces, of which he experienced almost six months. After World War II he returned to Czechoslovakia. This practical contact in Europe vouches for the story he translated.

Publisher's Note

The English translation of this story, as far as we have been able to tell, was first published during World War II. We have taken the liberty of making a few changes to benefit the understanding of our audience. Yet we have maintained the simplicity of the story, in keeping with the previous editors and with the message of the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This remarkable testimony has been previously published in several languages, but we desire that even more souls may consider this witness for truth. We have here before us a picture of the essential pattern of salvation—a soul arrested by the Spirit of God, and surrendering to its Creator. Unlike Greasy, most of us are surrounded by religious influences pointing with some degree of truth toward the Savior. But no matter what agent God may use to arrest our hearts, there is no other way to reconciliation than that which Pasha Tikhomirov found. In the solitary recesses of our innermost souls, the Spirit of God will come alone to convict us of offending the law of truth, and to offer us the gift of life. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Jn. 6:44). When facing the Supreme Judge, we have no other mediator than Christ Jesus, our atonement. “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn. 14:6).

Our prayer is that the Lord may use this story to arrest the sinner in his skepticism, warn the mere professor of their false hopes of heaven, and stir the believer to renewed labor in the vineyard of our God. “But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Lk. 8:15).

—*The Publishers*, 2010

Glossary

Alexey Vasilevitch (*ah-lyik-SAY vuh-SEE-lyih-vich*)

Baikal (*bahy-KAHL*)

Batushka (*BUH-thyush-kuh*)—daddy

Chelyabinsk (*chyyih-LYAH-byinsk*)

Dunya (*DOO-nyuh*)—pet name for Eudoxia

Duratchki (*doo-ruch-KEE*)—tomfool

Irkutsk (*eer-KOOTSK*)

Kiev (*KYEE-yif*)

kopek (*KO-pek*)—Russian unit of money, 1/100 of a ruble

Kursk (*KOORSK*)

Mogilev (*muh-gyi-LYAWF*)—a territory of the Russian Empire in the 19th century, situated in the present-day Republic of Belarus in eastern Europe.

Omsk (*AWMSK*)

Pasha (*PAH-shuh*)—Paul

Penza (*PEN-zuh*)

Samara (*suh-MAH-ruh*)

samovar (*sam-uh-VAHR*)—Russian tea kettle

Saratov (*sa-RAH-tuhf*)

Shura (*SHOO-duh*)—Alexandra

Solovyov (*suh-luhv-YAWF*)

Sosnovka (*sos-NAWF-kuh*)

Stundist (*SHTUN-dist*)—a member of an evangelical movement

Tanya (*TAHN-yuh*)—pet name for Tatiana

Tatiana (*tahts-YAW-nuh*)

Tikhomirov (*tsee-khah-MEEDR-awf*)—“quiet peace”

Tomsk (*TAWMSK*)—a territory in western Siberia, about 2500 miles (4000 km) from Mogilev.

Voronezh (*vuh-RAW-nyish*)

Yeniseysk (*yen-i-SEYSK*)

Yuri Nikolaievitch (*YOO-ree nik-uh-LI-yih-vich*)

By the time he turned sixteen, Greasy was taking 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 being disturbed. 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...
