In the shadow of death

A report from the Soviet Russia

by Gerhard Fast

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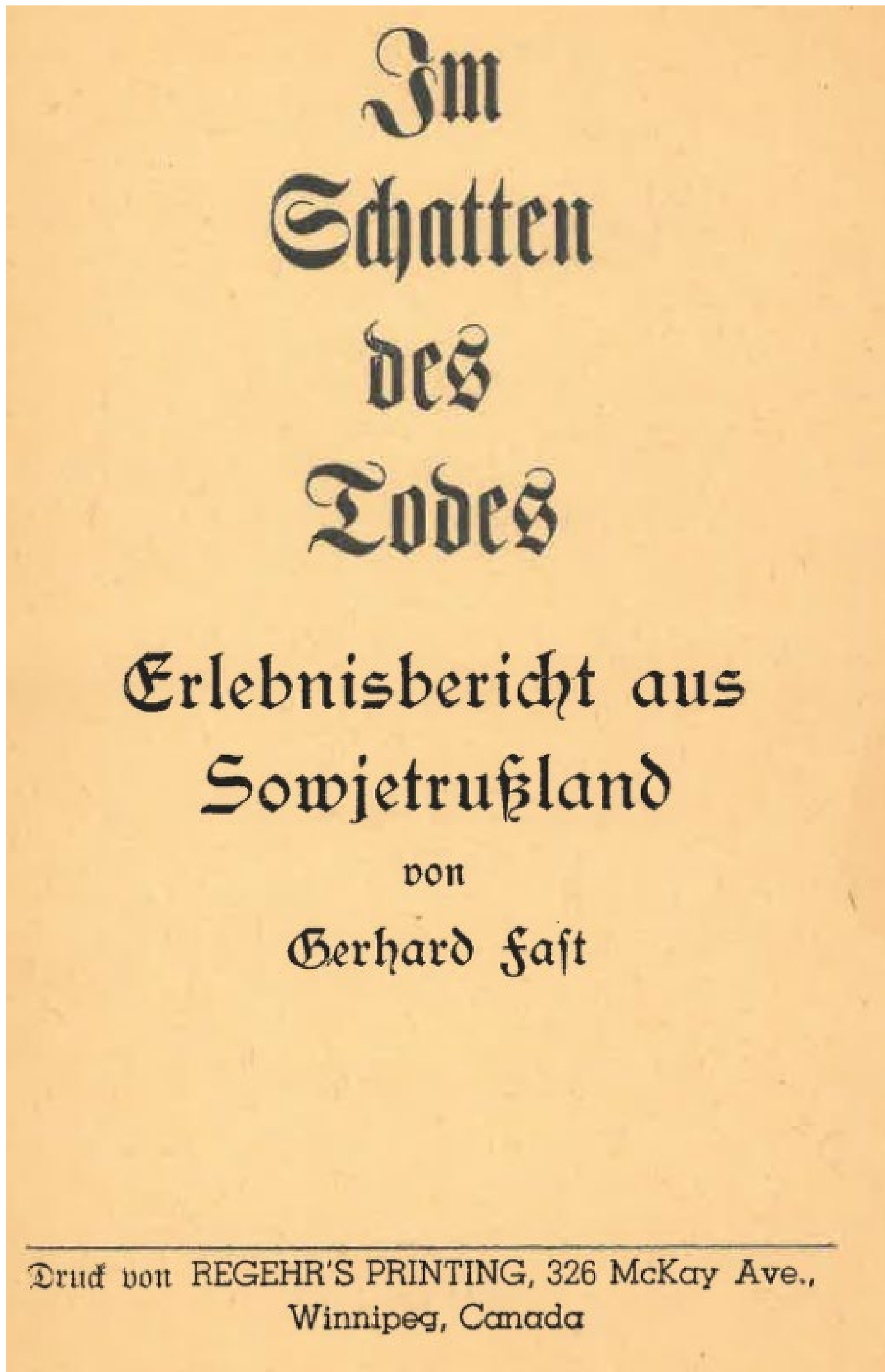

Im Schatten des Todes

Erlebnisbericht aus Sowjetrußland

von

Gerhard Fast

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[Der Bote obituary]

In the crucible

Once more into the fiery blaze!

O Father, I dread the blazing flood, O Master, merciful one, O stop, I can no longer bear the painful torment!

The divine smelter in holy repose looks at the fire, the melting one.

His eyelashes do not flinch, his hand does not slacken, he keeps his eyes fixed on the crucible.

He examines the silver, he holds it up to the light, It almost seems clear that nothing is amiss; But he sees dross, hidden and small, That clouds the mirror, darkens the shine.

And again and again into the glow It seethes and bubbles, nothing disturbs his courage, Until at last in the silver, in the radiant glow His face is reflected quite bright and quite pure.

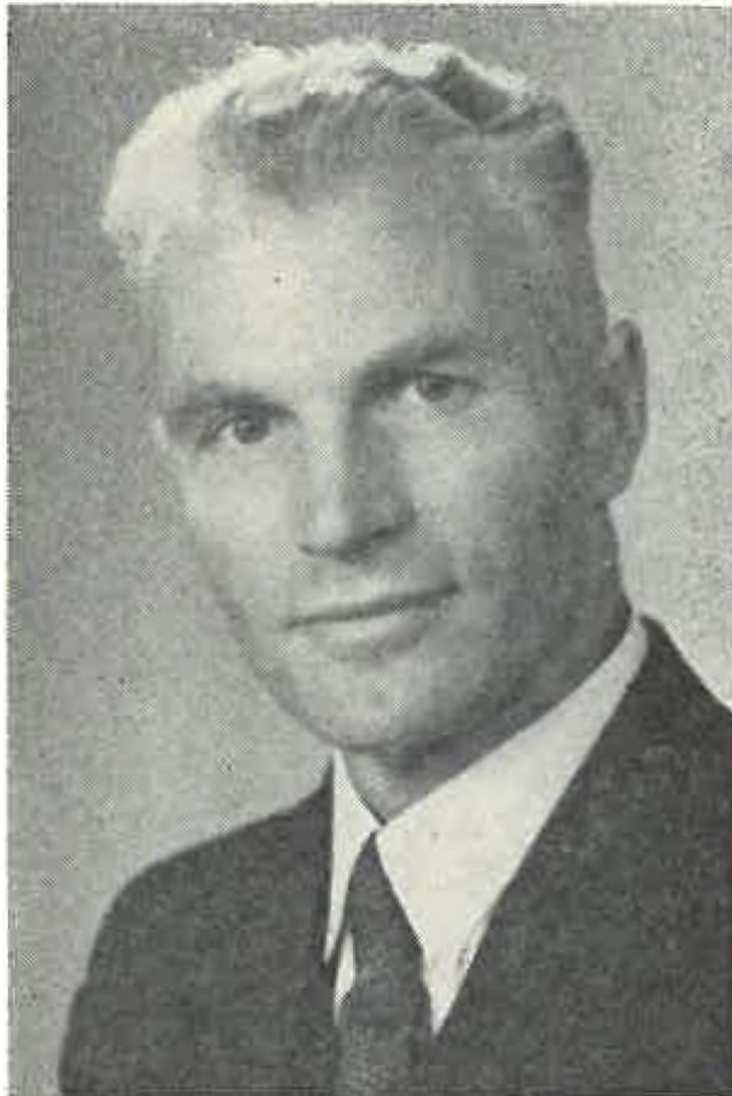
Then from the crucible he soon takes the silver, And molds it and presses it and gives it shape

A precious vessel, sent to serve, He brings it to the heavenly Father, happy.

O Savior, is it so, then spare me not, If sometimes in suffering I lack courage.

O divine Smelter, then ransom me And bring me home to the Father perfect!

The above poem is the testimony of faith of the exiled preacher I. Toews. He sent it as a greeting and confession from the primeval forests of northern Russia, where he also found his grave.



Preface.

The experiences in this book mainly fall within the first years of Stalin's tyrannical rule, which came to an end with his death.

The book was published before the Second World War, 13,000 copies, and has long since sold out. I did not want it reprinted again either, but I keep being asked to do so from various sides.

If things are easier in Russia today after Stalin's death, let us rejoice and thank God for it.

The author.

September 1956 Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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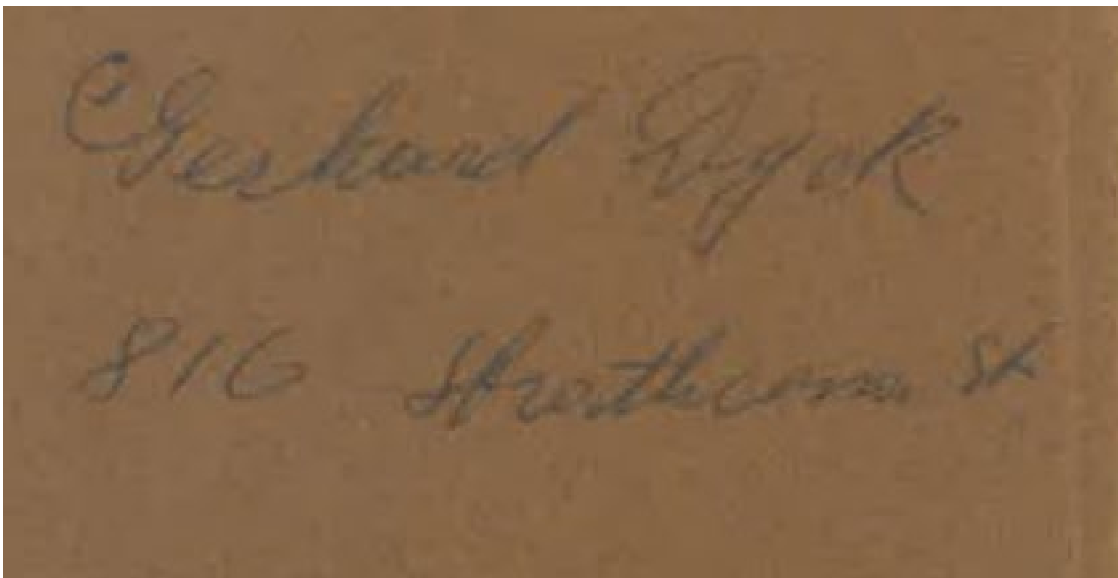
Tim's notes:

1.) All hyphenated words are unhyphenated. Some short sentence fragments across page breaks are reunited. Other than this, pagination is as in the original.
2.) German authors love dashes, short dashes, long dashes, multiple dashes, to regulate the reading speed. These are unnecessary by English standards and almost all are removed.
3.) Russian words are not translated but the author provides a German translation which is translated.
4.) German authors don't see a problem with putting a "?" or "!" in a sentence and then continuing without starting a new sentence. I have left these unchanged.
5.) Interestingly, the previous owner of this book made 2 corrections in the text. Both are correct.
6.) The author uses about 6 words to describe a place to sleep, none of which we would choose. At each first occurrence I have indicated the original word in [square brackets].
7.) I have formatted this document as 8.5" x 11". The page size may be changed.
8.) There are 2 sets of page numbers at the bottom of most pages. The first is the books page number which starts on page 3 and the second is the documents page number which starts on page 1. The second could be eliminated but is useful when navigating around the document during editing.
9.) The original owner of this copy of this document was a Gerhard Dyck who lived in Saskatchewan. He wrote his name on the inside cover.



In the shadow of death

Nikolai II has escaped

I'm sitting with my wife on the train from the great Siberian railroad. Our train is rolling in the direction of Novosibirsk, then Novo Mikolajevsk. We are traveling from Omsk to Slavgorod and are a few stations away from Omsk. From Tatarskaya there is now a railroad that was built two years ago and connects our settlement with the main Siberian railroad. We are no longer three hundred kilometers away from the railroad, but only sixty-five, which is a great relief for our settlement.

The train is overcrowded. They are mostly soldiers returning home from the front. The great war with Germany is over, but not the terrible consequences of it. It is mid-April 1918, and in Germany the terrible struggle against half the world is still not over. The war between Germany and Russia was the greatest mistake of these two governments.

This war swept the Romanov family from their three-hundred-year reign.

When the temporary government of Kerensky came to power after the fall of the tsar, it immediately made a mistake that was to prove disastrous for the whole of Russia.

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The people were tired of the war and wanted nothing more than peace. But Kerensky, with the German-eater Milyukov, raised the slogan: "War together with Entente against Germany to the victorious end!" Milyukov said in a major speech in St. Petersburg: "Now we must defeat the Germans outside the borders and the Germans within the borders!" We Germans in the East had suffered little from the war until then, but who does not know the terrible suffering of the German colonists in western Russia? Milyukov's threat showed that the idea of Pan-Slavism, which saw the Germans as the greatest enemy of the Slavs, still haunted some people's minds. Then came the reclamation of the Western Front.

Now Lenin and Trotsky appeared on the scene with the slogan: "Peace at all costs for the world!" Sailors and soldiers cheered them on, for they were tired of the war, and thus came the October Revolution of 1917 which brought the Communist Party to power in Russia.

For the sake of appearances, the Bolsheviks convened a constitutional assembly in the winter of 1918. When it convened, Lenin put to it the question of whether it wanted to recognize the dictatorship and the program of the Communist Party. When it decisively refused, the opponents had to pack their bags and leave St. Petersburg in a hurry. Lenin and Trotsky were the rulers of this gigantic empire, which occupied a sixth of the earth.

If Kerensky and Milyukov had made peace with Germany at that time, the Bolsheviks would never have come to power; the masses knew nothing of Lenin and Trotsky. The following short story shows how little their names were known at the time:

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In the first days after the October coup, Trotsky wants to leave the government building at midnight.

"ID please!" says the soldier on duty.

"I don't have any."

"Then I won't let you through."

"What, you won't let me through? I'm Trotsky!"

"I'm sorry, comrade, I've never heard the name before," replied the soldier calmly, and Trotsky had to go back for an identity card.

Soon, however, the Russian people would come to know Lenin and Trotsky's names only too well, for they were written into their flesh with a bloody, iron stylus.

It is midnight. Suddenly a shrill sound from the locomotive and our train stops. Heads pop out of all the windows and peer into the dark night, terrified. There is no station to be seen and we are standing in an open field. Nobody knows what this unexpected stop means. Soon the mystery is solved. Red soldiers enter and check passports.

"What does this passport inspection in open field mean?" the front-line soldiers ask. They are given no answer. The soldiers become increasingly agitated and defiant. They want to know the reason for this unusual night-time passport revision. The de-mobilized soldiers were not to be trifled with back then. They were the masters of the situation on the railroad and many a man who resisted them was mercilessly beaten.

As the ominous questions and grim mumblings become more and more threatening, the passport control officer finally gives in and bursts out:

"Why are we checking passports? I will tell you. Nikolai the Second has escaped."

The soldiers laugh. "Him you'll find with a passport! He's sure to have a hundred passes for you," they say, and nobody believes the inspector's words.

Several years later, I read a book published by the Bolsheviks, "The End of the Tsar's Family". It also described the tsar's escape. A commissar, who was supposed to bring the Tsar's family from Tobolsk to Moscow, secretly decided to save them. Instead of heading for Ekaterinburg, he took them in the direction of Omsk and then wanted to travel on the old line from Omsk to Chelyabinsk. This route led past his home in the Ural Mountains. He wanted to hide and rescue the Tsar's family there. He did not tell anyone about this secret plan, not even the Tsar himself.

But Moscow did not let the Tsar's family out of its sight. They soon discovered the wrong direction that Commissar Yokovlev had taken with them. Moscow became nervous. The telegraph wires work feverishly. One station before Omsk, Yokovlev's train is stopped. He travels to Omsk, contacts Moscow by telephone and explains that the route via Ekaterinburg seems too dangerous to him, so he has chosen this detour. Moscow, however, gives him strict orders to bring the Tsar's family back to Ekaterinburg immediately on the Omsk-Tyumen railroad line. Yakovlev's plan failed.

The book gave the date on which the train with the Tsar's family had stopped outside Omsk. I quickly open my diary and search,

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when our train was stopped in the open field behind Omsk. It was the same day, and the inspector wasn't lying when he said: "Nikolai the Second has escaped."

In the summer of the same year, the entire Tsar's family was shot in a cellar in Ekaterinburg. Shortly afterwards, the city was taken by the Whites, and help arrived a few days too late.

The hardship begins

It is the fall of 1919 and I am teaching in my classroom. "Teacher, the whole street is full of soldiers!" one of the pupils suddenly shouts.

I quickly take a look outside and see what the boy has said. A few soldiers with shotguns on their backs are already riding into the courtyard. They are the Bolsheviks. Kolchak and his army are retreating further and further to the east, and now the "Reds" have taken our village too. One by one they come in with the harsh order: "Teacher, give us oats and hay for our horses! Teacher, give us lunch!"

We give lunch to a dozen of these guys, then they leave for the neighboring village. We are under the rule of the Bolsheviks. The peasants were soon to taste the yoke of communist bloodlust.

A few men from each village were summoned to the district assembly. Comrade Shatokhin convened the meeting. He is the government's representative for grain and meat deliveries and

wants to talk about it. The meeting is opened by the chairman, Comrade Shatokhin is given the floor.

"Comrades, you know that the workers' and peasants' government has your best interests at heart. Soon you will no longer be working with horses, but with tractors. We won't need the horses any more, because the tractor will replace them, and we'll only have to feed it when it's working. It stands in the barn all winter long and eats no hay or oats. We will also electrify the whole of Russia. There will be a movie theater in every village. You will no longer have to work from dawn to dusk. Every farmer will only work eight hours, put on his best suit and go for a walk.

Your government will look after you like a father looks after his children. The servitude has now come to an end. You have been enslaved long enough. Now you are free citizens of the only free workers' and peasants' state in the world. All over the world the workers and peasants are being exploited to death by the capitalists, but now you are the government yourselves, because we have a workers' and peasants' government.

Today, however, this government needs a little help from you, a small loan. You must voluntarily hand over to the state all your grain and livestock that you do not need. We have calculated how much wheat, oats, barley and livestock each village can give. You are only to give everything to the state on loan. Later you will receive tractors and other agricultural machinery from them........."

In this tone, comrade Shatokhin continues with his

long, hour-and-a-half-long speech... The peasants shift restlessly in their places, nothing helps them, they have to wait quietly until Comrade Shatokhin has finished his litany. Finally he stops.

"Who wants to speak?"

"Please tell me, Comrade Shatokhin, how much grain and livestock should each village deliver?"

Shatochin reads: "Blumenort 6000 hundredweight, Gnadenheim 8000, Kleefeld 9000...

"Stop, stop, we will never ever give that!" the peasants shout in confusion.

Shatochin turns pale, but remains calm, and when the peasants are quiet, he reads on: "Reinfeld 6000, Rosenwald 7000, Schoental 9000, Lichtfelde 10 000..."

"Stop! We are supposed to give you everything we have, but what will you give us in return? There are no longer any shops where the peasant can buy his necessities, because you have abolished all private trade. Instead, you have taken over the supply of goods yourself. How do you do that? You send a few meters of cotton and a few nails to an entire village. Then every two or three months each peasant gets half a meter of cotton and one or two nails. You give us that! But forgive me, Comrade Shatochin, I am insulting you. Sometimes there is even a baby's soother in there. I almost forgot that. You give us a baby's soother for all our wheat and cattle! Tell me yourself, what on earth is a whole village supposed to do with a baby's soother? Are they

Supposed to nail it to the corner of the village well and take turns sucking on it? . .

Bergen, the sarcastic teacher, continues in this tone for a long time. Comrade Shatokhin does not let himself be put off.

He remains completely calm and composed, only turning a little pale now and then at the crass remarks and repeating slowly and emphatically: "And yet you will give what is asked for!"

"He's crazy, he'll never get it," shouts one farmer after another.

A week later, the whole road to town is full of grain carts. The peasants not only give Shatokhin the grain that Shatokhin asked for at the time, but much more, because Shatokhin knew how to force them to obey.

The poor man's last cow

It is autumn 1922. Under the rule of the Bolsheviks, taxes in kind became greater and heavier from year to year. For many, the harvest was not enough. Those who could not deliver enough grain, slaughtered cattle or sheep and pigs had to be delivered.

When the farmers had driven the grain to the city sixty-five kilometers away, they usually had to wait for a long time, sometimes even for days, before they could get rid of the grain. All the granaries were overflowing and the grain was simply dumped outside in the open air. The outer walls were made of full grain sacks, and in the end this airy granary was covered with tarpaulins.

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For days it rained and snowed on this grain, and gigantic amounts of the finest wheat decayed and rotted.

In December the meat was delivered. In our colony half of all the dairy cows were slaughtered, because there were not enough other cattle. Almost all of us Germans had very good dairy cows, the so-called German red cows, which were valued throughout Russia as being particularly productive. Here is a small example of how strict the procedure was.

All the farmers had slaughtered their cattle and were to take them to town the next day. The evening before there was a general village meeting. The head of the village asked everyone in turn whether they had slaughtered their cattle and were ready to take them to town the next day. One by one they had to declare. Everyone was ready.

"Bergen?" asked the mayor.

"No!" came a slow and timid answer from the back row.

"Why not?"

"I only have one cow. That's all I have. I don't have any grain left either. The cow is the only source of food for me, my wife and our three small children. If I slaughter the cow too, we'll have nothing left and my children will starve."

Dead silence. No one dares to say a word. Everyone knows that Bergen has told the whole truth. He is the poorest farmer in the village, but no one can accuse him of dishonesty. The mayor is also silent for a moment, because he too knows Bergen's tragic situation.

After a long silence, during which one could have heard a fly, he turns to Bergen again: "Bergen, can you raise your taxes by delivering grain?"

"No, I have nothing left!"

Another long silence.

"Bergen, how do you think you will pay your taxes?"

"Do I really have to give up my only cow, the only food for my small children?"

"Yes, Bergen, if you have nothing else to pay with, you must give it up. The government is ruthless and knows no mercy."

"Well then you can have it, but I cannot slaughter it alone at night," Bergen answers in a quiet but determined voice.

"Citizens, who will help him with the slaughter?" asks the foreman.

Again a long silence.

Help Bergen? Many would like to, but helping him slaughter his only cow, helping him destroy his children's only source of food? No one is willing to do that.

"Citizens, I understand why you don't want to help him. But he has to give up the cow, no matter how hard it is for him. But he can't possibly slaughter the cow tonight alone, and so we must help him do it. Who will do it?"

Again a complete silence.

"I will help!" someone from the ranks finally speaks up. "Me too, me too," a second, third and fourth.

They arm themselves with the necessary slaughtering tools and slowly walk towards Bergen's farm. He walks ahead, tired. At home, he opens the small cowshed.

"Moo!" is the soft cry. The cow recognizes her owner and moos trustingly at him, thinking he is bringing her the usual evening meal. Bergen stands there undecided for a moment. But then he jumps up suddenly, presses his deathly pale lips tightly together, strides resolutely into the stable, unties the cow's rope and leads her onto the cold, snow-covered yard.

"Moo! Moo!" the cow cries out as loudly as she can, she doesn't quite feel comfortable with the situation. She has a bad feeling.

"What's going on? What do you want?!" his wife rushes out. When she sees the cow, she cries out loudly: "But not our cow, our only food?"

"Yes, Maria, it must be, there is no other way."

She doesn't say another word, turns around and staggers back into the hut.

"Moo..." the cow bellows once more, but falls silent in mid bellow and dies under the men's knife. A loud cry can be heard from inside, followed by long, heart-rending sobs.

Then it becomes quiet. After an hour the men slowly walk out of the yard... The executioner's task is complete.

Who will give the children the warm milk the next morning, their only food?

The next day, early in the morning, when it will still be dark for a long time, everything in the village is stirring. A large load of slaughtered cattle is driven from every farm. It is cold and the meat is frozen solid. Late in the evening they come

in the district town. Along the way, thousands of farm carts with slaughtered, frozen cattle from all the villages in the large district were encountered.

"Will we be able to get rid of our cattle?" the farmers ask themselves the next morning when they get up at 5 a.m., quickly harness their horses and go to the meat delivery point. Nobody knows where it is. Finally they find out that it is far outside the city.

We drive there. When we arrive, there are already thousands and thousands of meat carts waiting ahead of us. Finally, at 8 a.m., the officials come to take the meat. More and more people come with their meat, and the supply grows to an avalanche of meat. Once it has been weighed, the meat is simply thrown out onto the snow in the open air. In the evening, many have not yet delivered their meat because it was not yet their turn. Some stand there for days, and only if you slip the official a bottle of vodka (brandy) can you get rid of your meat more quickly.

The meat lies there in the open air for months because the railway cannot cope with the transport. Herds of stray dogs run around the meat yard, feasting, celebrating and breeding in the frozen beef carcasses.

Here too lies Bergen's only cow!

A few kilometers away, thousands of tons of wheat are rotting in the open air. Even further away, there is an enormous pile of potatoes, which have also been taken from the farmers by force.

Bergen's children are crying for bread and milk.

In the Volga region, millions are dying of hunger during this time.

The New Economic Policy

The whole of Russia was so devastated and destroyed during the first war years of communism that Lenin himself was forced to grant private enterprise a little more freedom. Private trade was permitted again, the farmers increased their sowing areas, and replaced the used ten-year-old agricultural machinery with the grain surplus. The factory chimneys that had been dead until then began to smoke again, the workers had work and bread, the bread cards disappeared, there was enough of everything. A new life pulsed through the great Russian colossus, and in a few years the flourishing Russia was unrecognizable.

On the advice of the government, the German villages founded seed and breeding cooperatives. Through these cooperatives they wanted to spread pure seed and pedigree cattle throughout Russia. Several of these cooperatives also bought tractors and large agricultural machines. In this way a certain communal cultivation of the land was established, but each farmer got the yield of his fields into his own hands and could dispose of it as he saw fit. For the pure seed that the cooperatives supplied to the state, they received a price which was a quarter higher than for ordinary grain, as per contract.

Many good and praiseworthy measures were taken during the period of the New Economic Policy, many schools and hospitals were built and efforts were made to raise the cultural level of the Russian people. Unfortunately, this period also had many dark sides,

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the school teachings were communism and atheism, and many teachers had to resign from their posts for reasons of conscience. I also left the teaching profession and became a farmer. Church services were permitted, but according to the law in Soviet Russia we only had tolerance of religion, not freedom of religion. All religious instruction for children under eighteen was also forbidden. Religious bodies were deprived of their rights, all churches, prayer houses and objects of worship were declared state property, and the communities had to lease them from the state. The registration of community members was a lot of work and frustrating. Each community had to draw up a list of its community members in several copies. This often required journeys of seven hundred kilometers or more. When community leaders then arrived with their lists, the authorities often found exceptions and the trip had to be repeated. But after the first terrible experiences of war communism, despite all the harassment, we were happy about the degree of religious freedom that was granted to us.

The Five-Year Plan comes to the village

With one stroke of the pen by Stalin, Lenin's successor, all the flourishing in Russia **ceased** again. The New Economic Policy had only been a brief respite. The Five-Year Plan was supposed to bring socialist paradise and happiness, but it destroyed millions of happy families who found a cold grave in the swamps and snowy regions of the far north, where they could finally rest from Stalin's tyranny.

It is 1929. I am on my way home from the city. It is a grim winter day after three days of terrible snowstorms. Everything is covered in deep snow. Even today the storm has not completely calmed down and is driving the white snow, like sand, before it. The Siberian snow desert is only rarely quiet, really quiet, when there is not a breath of wind. But as soon as there is a bit of wind, you can see on top of the snow a gentle, constant drifting of snow sand, which is particularly strong after a big snowstorm. It is the silent aftermath of the snowstorm. The high road we are travelling on is also covered with fresh snow, the horse tracks and the sleigh tracks are immediately blown away by the driven snow, and only the signposts show the traveler the way.

The journey is difficult, and my driver and I walk behind the sleigh to warm our frozen limbs a little. Suddenly a bell rings behind us. A mail sleigh is approaching. The coachman is sitting in front with his long whip. He only cracks it from time to time to encourage the horses. Three men are sitting in the back of the sleigh. The horses are covered in sweat and, despite all the coachman's encouragement, no longer want to gallop. They are walking more and more slowly. When they catch up with us, they do not rush past us as mail sleighs usually do, but drive behind us at a walking pace. The **coachman** jumps off the sleigh and runs alongside it. The three men in the back also get out and follow on foot. All three of them are wearing beautiful, large, black sheepskin coats,

they wear tall felt boots on their feet, warm gloves on their hands and expensive karakul hats on their heads. They walk slowly behind the sledge, their sheepskin coats wide open, because underneath they also wear a tight-fitting short-wool fur coat.

It is the "Five-Year Plan" that is walking slowly behind me in the form of these men. The three men in the large sheepskin coats are communists. They are being sent from the city to the villages to begin the implementation of the Five-Year Plan.

Now one of these comrades breaks away from his group, runs past his sleigh and comes running through the deep snow, puffing and panting in his thick, warm fur coat.

"How far is it to the next village?" he asks as he catches up with us.

"Ten kilometers!" we answer.

"But that's still a long way," he says, cursing, stops and waits until the others have caught up and then rejoins them.

"The coachman is right; the people up ahead also say that it is ten kilometers to the next village."

"Well, comrades, then we must be patient, because our horses cannot move forward so quickly on this route. "Ten kilometers! So it is," answers the one in the middle with the strongly curved nose.

All three light cigarettes, get back into the sleigh, wrap themselves in sheepskins and call out to the coachman in an imperative manner: "Now, coachman, pogonjaj!" (Now, coachman, drive on!) He jumps onto his seat,

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pulls the reins tauter, cracks his whip, and the Five-Year Plan drives past us at a brisk gallop and with the sound of bells. The horses only run half a kilometer through the deep snow, then they slow to a walk again, because the poor animals cannot possibly run on such a path. The "Five-Year Plan" gets up again, gets out of the sleigh and walks slowly behind the sleigh in his thick sheepskin coats. He learns on his first trip that not everything goes at the pace prescribed by Stalin. But he walks, albeit slowly, but steadfastly, and the poor peasants will soon feel it.

Budyonny travels through Siberia

It is ten o'clock in the evening. Suddenly there is a knock on my door, a boy comes in and hands me an invitation and says:

"I was at the village council, and the secretary says you should come to Halbstadt tomorrow at 10 o'clock to receive the Minister of War [1])."

"Good, my boy!"

When he left the room, I thought, it can't possibly be Voroshilov, the war commissar.

It's not clear from the invitation either, because it only says that I want to speak to the village council on my way to Halbstadt, where I'll find out more. When I appear at the village council the next day, the secretary gives me a written summons to receive Budyonny, the inspector of the Red cavalry and Voroshilov's chief assistant.

1.) Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny, [O.S. 13 April] 1883 – 26 October 1973) was a Soviet cavalryman, military commander during the Russian Civil War, Polish-Soviet War and World War II, and politician, who was a close political ally of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin.

After three hours we are in Halbstadt. It is the seat of our district government. The whole street is busy. Long rows of carts with grain are lined up in the street, waiting for Budyonny to arrive. It is the so-called red grain transport with red flags. It is supposed to show Budyonny how eagerly the peasants voluntarily give the government grain. It is only with great difficulty that they have managed to find grain carts, because the Five-Year Plan, the three men in sheepskins, have already pumped out all the grain, that was their first job, but a red convoy with red flags is a presentation for Budyonny.

The poor horses! They still have forty kilometers to travel with the heavy grain sledges to the next town, they want to stop here for only short time to have their photo taken with the red war ruler from Moscow, and now they have to stand outside on the street for hours in the cold, biting wind. It is midday, Budyonny is not coming. It is two, three o'clock, Budyonny does not come. At the end of the village the guard is standing to announce his arrival.

Suddenly he is there. Unannounced, he suddenly appears among the crowd. He has come from the other end of the village. He is a Cossack of medium height, with broad shoulders and a long black moustache, the ends of which point to the right and left on either side of his broad face like two long taracan (cockroach) antennae. He is led by the Communists for a snack in the house of the kulak Dyck, who has to entertain him. The grain carts are quickly divided into two

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long rows. When Budyonny comes out again, he stands between them and is photographed with the district head among a circle of other communists. The kulak Dyck is also standing next to him and is in the picture.

Then everyone hurries to the red workers' club at the steam mill at the end of the village, because Budyonny wants to give a speech to the village delegates about the Five-Year Plan. The grain carts slowly start moving towards the city forty kilometers away. If Budyonny had come in the morning, they would already be there, and if he hadn't come at all, the poor horses would have been standing in the warm stables eating oats and hay.

The workers' club is overcrowded. The board is sitting on the dais, including a couple of uneducated peasant women. Budyonny is in their midst. It is seven o'clock in the evening and we were invited for ten o'clock in the morning.

The district head stands up: "I am opening our special meeting, at which our party comrade Budyonny wants to tell us something about the Five-Year Plan. Does anyone else have anything to add to this evening's program?" Everyone is silent. "Nobody? So, unanimously accepted, and I give the floor to Comrade Budyonny."

Budyonny, with his long, black moustache, stands up and gives a long speech about the Five-Year Plan. But he only talks about one part of the Five-Year Plan, about collectivization.

"In the first Five-Year Plan we only want to collectivize 25% of all peasant farms, because it is impossible to convert the whole agricultural system in five years.

This would only lead to chaos, which would cause great harm rather than benefit. We now only want to collectivize a sector of 25%. These collectives should provide us with enough bread for the army and the workers, and whatever the remaining peasant farms produce will then all go for export. Nor should collectivization be carried out by force. The peasants should personally convince themselves of the advantages of the first collective, that we will establish, and then they will join the collectives voluntarily. There should be no coercion, everything will be voluntary. The workers' and peasants' government is not like the tsars', which would ruthlessly oppress the peasants' exploits, but it will do everything for the benefit of the workers and peasants..."

A couple of communists speak out after the speech and praise the Soviet government to the skies. Budyonny says a brief closing remark, the meeting is ended, and the peasants go home.

The pig under the oak tree

The Five-Year Plan continues. Sowing has been completed, but not the implementation of the grain procurement plan. Each village is supposed to deliver a few thousand hundredweights of wheat, but there is none left. The government in Moscow has drawn up a plan. The level of the harvest is decided in the spring, but most of the time it is much less than the plan called for, and the peasants are deprived of the last grain.

Because the grain procurement plan cannot be implemented, the peasants are taxed for a second time. This is done according to the class principle. The peasants are

divided into poor, middle and large farmers. Then, for example, the harvest yield of a middle farmer is calculated to be thirty to forty percent higher than that of a poor farmer, and which is even higher for a "kulak". The Russian word kulak means fist, i.e. exploiter. The kulak is not a landowner, but an ordinary farmer who has become the model farmer of the village through hard work and efficiency. If a farmer has employed a farmhand or a maid or has lent out his agricultural machinery for compensation, he is branded a kulak. He has not broken a law, on the contrary, according to the law every farmer was allowed to employ up to three foreign workers. This regulation was issued in Lenin's time and was not changed, but at the beginning of the Five-Year Plan those who had employed foreign workers were declared "exploiters" and were deprived of their voices and rights.

In our village there was a farmer who had employed a girl for a year, not secretly, the government had set up a rental agreement between him and the girl. In return, the farmer was deprived of his voice, all his belongings were sold off and banished one and a half years to the far north, but today, after five years, he is still not free.

A second farmer had no outside labor, but had lent his threshing machine. He was deprived of his rights, arrested, thrown into prison and later banished along with his wife and six children.

A third wanted to dig a well. The wells there were forty meters deep, he could not do it alone,

he hired a helper and was branded a kulak for it.

Soon they began to "dekulakize," i.e. the government taxed the kulaks with high grain deliveries, even though they had already given up their last grain. If they could not deliver what was required, everything they had was sold. In one village in the district, they brought together the kulaks' belongings and auctioned them off publicly.

One day I am in Orlov, the village where the district administration used to be and where I. A. Reimer, the founder of the settlement, worked as the first mayor.

The entire courtyard of the former volost administration is full of agricultural machinery. It is Monday. On Sunday there was a public auction of the kulak property here. I walk through the rows of machines. There are brand new ones among them, which farmers bought from the government a year ago for two hundred rubles (400 marks). Now the same government has sold the farmers' machinery for twenty or thirty rubles, and not because he still owes the purchase price, which he has long since paid, and he has also paid all his taxes, but only because he belongs to the category of the disenfranchised.

As I walk through the rows of machinery, a government official comes out of the former volost building. I know him, he is Gekel, the German. This word is used to describe the German communists who either remained in Russia as prisoners of war or came from Germany after the war. They are not at all popular with the farmers, not even Comrade Gekel. The peasants call him Ekel [disgusting/obnoxious person].

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He is also a former prisoner of war, stayed in Russia, became a communist, and now holds a good office, although he only speaks broken Russian and no proper German. In Germany he was a simple worker, here he is a farmer and sells his fellow man's belongings, which they have acquired over the years through honest work and the sweat of their brow.

I speak to him:

"Tell me, Comrade Gekel, why are the farmers being ruined like this? You don't actually achieve anything by it."

"Why not? The farmers are not delivering their grain quota, and that is why they are being disenfanchised."

"The farmers are not giving their grain? They gave all the grain to the state before the sowing season. You know that we Germans have been breeding pure seeds for the government for years and, according to the contract, hand over all our grain to the government. Who has any surplus grain now? Have these reprisals been of any use?"

"Yes, in Ebenfeld we found thirty hundredweight of oats on a farmer!"

"And that's all?"

"Yes."

"And because you found thirty hundredweight of oats in the possession of one farmer in fifty villages, you are now ruining the best farms in all the empire? But that will harm the whole empire."

"Oh, the empire will not be harmed. The horses, the cows and the machines will remain in the empire. They have just been taken from the kulaks and will go to other

hands, but the state will not be harmed by it."

I part with this communist, who is just the dregs of human society, and go on to the place where the monument to the former Prime Minister Stolypin stood. It has disappeared. I find the pieces of it behind the stable. Only pitiful fragments lie in the corner, and that is how it looks all over Russia. The destruction began with the Tsar, and now it has reached the farmers. Now the axe is being put to the root of the empire, the farmers. The best citizens of Russia have either already been murdered, or they are living in prisons and places of exile, and an international rabble with the bloodthirsty Stalin at its head rules over the huge empire, which is forty-five times larger than the whole of Germany. What is Russia to these people? Let it perish, as long as they live well. The Russian fable writer Krylov was so aptly right again with his fable "The Pig under the Oak tree".

It digs at the roots of the oak tree. A raven sits on top of the tree and says to it: "Why are you destroying the roots of the oak tree? The oak tree will dry up because of it." "Oh, let it dry up, what's it to me as long as I only get my acorns!" answers the pig and continues digging angrily.

Thus, year after year, ignorance has been digging at the roots of the Russian people's strength, and one oak tree after another is drying up. But what does that matter to Comrade Disgust, as long as he gets his acorns.

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Outside Moscow

A gloomy autumn day. Fifteen thousand German farmers are lying outside the gates of Moscow. They left all their belongings behind, fled to Moscow to obtain permission to leave the country. Many of them had sold everything they had worked for over many years with the sweat of their brow to the government at home. Every day a delegation goes to Kalinin and pleads, like Moses and Aaron in Egypt: "Let my people go!" But every time the answer is the same: "We will not let you go, go to your assignments!"

It is mid-October. Another delegation is with Kalinin. Again, they come with the same request: "Let my people go!"

"You can all go, you will be given instructions outside, go and act accordingly," is the completely unexpected answer today.

"We can all go!"

With these words they rush out and shout to their waiting brothers.

A Soviet official approaches the group: "Go home quickly, group yourselves into 100 to 200 families, form committees to compile lists, sort the papers, and submit them in groups. But it must be quick, you must all be out by the October celebrations!"

"We can all go!" is the word that goes from mouth to mouth, from house to house, from place to place. There is great rejoicing in all the families. "Soon, soon we will be away from the tyrannical rule of the Bolsheviks and

can live in another country free to live our faith and establish a new home."

A few days later, a government car from Moscow stops in front of the committee's building. Two officials jump out.

"Have you finished the papers for the first group?"

"They've just been finished."

"Come on, come with us, it has to be quick!"

In half an hour they are in the emigration department in Moscow. The lists are quickly compared with the existing papers. If the information on the list matches the enclosed passes, the latter goes into the wastepaper basket and a corresponding note is made in the list. After an hour, everything is ready.

"You must travel tonight, go home and get ready!"

At midnight the first train with refugees leaves for Germany, soon followed by the second, then the third and further trains, because the Moscow area is to be cleared of Germans by the October celebrations.

The first group gets through to Germany, but the second gets stuck in Leningrad, then everything comes to a standstill.

"Nobody wants you, nobody will take you in!" they suddenly say.

The sky, which had just been so clear, is suddenly covered with heavy storm clouds. The October celebrations come and go. The sky gets darker and darker, the day turns into night, and not a single ray of sunshine breaks through the black, threatening clouds.

Then, suddenly, on the day after the October festival, there was a bright, flash of lightning, a terrible clap of thunder, the first signs of the approaching terrible storm.

"Langemann has been arrested last night by the G.P.U.!" is whispered and fearfully passed from mouth to mouth one morning. Then everything is quiet again, and the black night only seems blacker.

But this sultry, eerie silence lasts only for a moment, then lightning strike follows lightning strike, blow after blow. Arrest after arrest. Now a mighty gust of wind. It throws several thousand German farmers back into their recently abandoned, destroyed home villages.

Suddenly it becomes quiet. A third of the refugees reaches Germany. Then the flood turns, but not covering Pharaoh's army, as in the times of Moses, but the German refugees who have remained behind.

Most of the men are arrested and languish behind thick prison walls, but the storm does not stay in Moscow, it spreads across the whole of Russia and still has no end.

I was also at the gates of Moscow with my family, but we too were among those who were not allowed to escape from Russia. My wife was forcibly sent back to Siberia with many others, while I was allowed to stay in the hospital with our son who was suffering from scarlet fever. Later my wife also came back, but there was little hope that we would be allowed to leave.

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My arrest

It is a beautiful, warm spring day. The snow has almost disappeared everywhere and tender green shoots are sprouting. I feel like there is lead in my limbs and I am depressed. In the afternoon my wife suggests a little trip across the stream to the young pine forest. I agree and we go. We lie down in the sunshine at the edge of the pine forest to take an afternoon nap. I roll from side to side and cannot fall asleep. I get up quietly. My wife has fallen asleep. I have something on my mind, a dark premonition that I cannot explain. I walk away quietly. When I look around, I see that my wife is running after me. I wait until she catches up with me and we walk back together. The sun is sinking towards the horizon. Now all three of us are sitting in our room and the strange, heavy premonition comes again. Suddenly the housemate's wife comes and asks for the house register (a register in which the residents of the house are registered with the police). A man wants to see it. It hits me like lightening: "It's the G.P.U." I am right. The man searches my house, gathers all the papers together and explains to me that I will have to go with him for a day or two. Then he sits down and tells me that I should discuss everything with my family. They cry and wring their hands. The G.P.U. agent consoles them and assures them that there is no complaint against me, they just want to check my papers and then I can come back.

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I sit there in silence and God gives me peace and strength.

"Jdjemtje!" (Let's go), says the Chekist at 9 o'clock.

Outside the door stands his assistant, a giant of a man. He has been keeping watch there the whole time.

I say a quick farewell to my loved ones. My wife follows me to the gate. The G.P.U. official turns around once more and explains to my wife: "Your husband will be back in two days!"

He says this so confidently that I believe it a little too.

We walk towards the exit under tall spruces and firs. My wife stops and watches us. We soon turn the corner and my loved ones disappear from my sight. Will I see them again in this life?

Lubyanka

Between two armed Chekists we walk to the station. Soon the train will arrive and take us to Moscow. We do not take the usual route that travelers use to leave the platform, but rather a side path. At the barrier, the Chekist shows his passport and is very politely let through. The G.P.U. agent calls for a car. After a few minutes, all three of us are sitting in a black, open G.P.U. car and driving through the streets of Moscow toward the center. Soon after, we stop in front of Lubyanka. This is a complex of houses in the center of Moscow. Here are the G.P.U. administrative buildings and the inner prison.

We go in. A mysterious silence surrounds us.

The guards stand like statues and do not move.

"A German," says my companion to the prison guard on duty.

"Number four!" is the laconic answer.

One of the guards takes me from the Chekist who arrested me and brought me here. I am taken to a cell for examination. After everything has been taken from me, I am put in an empty room, given a questionnaire to fill out and left alone. I write my answers in the columns of the form and wait to see what happens next. The door opens again, the guard asks me to come with him, leads me through a couple of corridors, stops in front of cell number 4, opens it, pushes me in, slams the door, turns the key: I am a prisoner!

It is the so-called dog cell. There are two types of it, a hot one and a cold one. I am in a hot one. Four people are already inside. They are all lying on wooden bunks. There is no free space for me, so I sit down at the feet of one of them and remain silent. The cell is dimly lit. There are two wooden bunks against one wall, one bunk against the other wall, and one bunk in the middle. In the corner next to the door is a large metal bucket for human needs, the so-called "parasha".

Now I too am in the clutches of the G.P.U.! Now I am a prisoner in the Lubyanka! Will I ever be free again? Will I ever see my family again? The Chekist said I would be back in two days, but this cell, these mysterious guards here, the thick walls, the whole area does not look as if the claws of the G.P.U. will open after just two days

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to let the little bird go free. No, no, what the Lubyanka has caught it in its clutches, it will not release again so quickly. I want to scream, scream out loud! The air is so thick, so tight, it is like a heavy nightmare on my chest, my palate is so dry, my tongue is burning, my throat seems to be constricting. I want to jump up and run against the door, smash the windows and break the iron bars and get out into freedom, into golden freedom!

Poor fool! One look at the door and window tells me that nothing, nothing will help, that I will remain a prisoner. There is no escape, no way out. But no, no, that is not possible, what will become of my family if I have to stay here, they have nothing left to live on and will starve and perish miserably without me. That is why I answered the question in the questionnaire about my special wishes: "I ask that my case be looked into as quickly as possible so that I can return to my family, who are left completely penniless and helpless and will perish without me."

Poor fool! You have only shown the G.P.U. your nakedness, with which they can poke and mortally wound you!

Slowly I raise my eyes and take a closer look at my fellow sufferers. They are lying quietly on their wooden beds, but they do not seem to be sleeping, because every now and then they open their eyes and quietly observe the new arrival.

Finally, from one corner, a

man with black, curly hair and a long, crooked nose comes up to me and asks: "Don't you have anything to smoke?"

"No, I'm a non-smoker."

"Non-smoker? What kind of person are you?"

"I'm a German."

"Ah, a German? He's also a German," he says, pointing to a man lying on the slat-wood cot [Holzpritsche] against the wall. We had already been silently observing each other.

"My name is Fast. Are you a German?" I turn to the man.

With a jerk he straightens up, sits down and says:

"Yes, my name is Jakob Brauer and I'm from Siberia."

"From Siberia? From which area?"

"From Omsk."

"From Omsk? Brauer from Omsk? Did you perhaps have a sister in Kleefeld?"

"Yes, that's where Mrs. Harder, my sister, lived."

"I know her well, because I lived with the Harders when I was a teacher in Kleefeld fifteen years ago. Why have you been arrested?"

"I am a German citizen, I wanted to move to Germany, I went to my brother in Germany last summer and brought my mother there. When I came back, I was arrested, accused of agitating for emigration, was held captive in the prisons of Omsk and Novosibirsk all winter, and now I have been brought here. I don't know what they will do with me. I arrived here in Moscow yesterday and spent the first night here."

We are very happy about our meeting. I tell him that I have been arrested and we chat for a long time, feeling like brothers here in the clutches of the G.P.U. Then our conversation stops and we both lost in our own thoughts.

Suddenly the Russian on whose bench I am sitting sits up, gathers up the rags he had been lying on, lies down on the ground next to the wooden slat bed and offers it to me to lie on. I protest, but he says calmly:

"Just lie down on the bench [Bank]. I am only a rag-picker and can lie on the ground. But you are an intelligent person and not used to lying on the floor. Just lie down on the bench and I'll go back to sleep down here."

Despite my encouragement, he doesn't return to the wooden slat bed, but turns on his side, pulls his rag coat further over his head and soon starts snoring. His bench is empty and I lie down to sleep. But nothing comes of it.

From time to time the door opens, a man is quietly pushed in, the door quietly closes again and everything is quiet again. The new prisoner looks around the four walls in amazement, sits down on the floor because all the slat beds are occupied, and broods about his fate.

By morning our cell is overcrowded and there are about a dozen of us prisoners. It becomes more and more unbearable in the already hot cell. Finally I can't stand it any longer, take off my outer clothes, sit down by the window and try to get some fresh air. But we are not in the hottest cell yet.

Some of my fellow sufferers later told me that it was even hotter in theirs. They took off all their clothes and gasped for fresh air from the crack under the door. From a cell like that you often end up in a cold cell, where you freeze even in the warmest clothes. I only spent one night in the hot cell, but my friend Brauer, whom I met here, was also in the cold cell.

Why do they do that? They do it to make people weak during their interrogation. They have to confess to everything that is wanted from them. They don't want to know what they did, because the G.P.U. knows only too well that they are innocent, but their victims have to sign away everything they want from them and everything they put before them. The G.P.U. needs that in order to blame these poor people for some failure in the Soviet economy, or also to prove their own vigilance and efficiency. "The G.P.U. is the ear and eye of the Soviet government," is what is always said during interrogation.

This night in the hot cell on the Lubyanka lasts a long, long time, but finally even the longest night comes to an end. The prisoners get up one after the other and wait for what happens next.

In a corner sits a young Chinese student. He rests his head on both hands, sighs deeply and murmurs quietly to himself:

"USSR .... dwa slowa .... reschetka .... ue dumal by ....! (Soviet Union ... two words .... behind lock and key .... I would not have thought.)"

What do these broken words mean in broken

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Russian from the anxious chest of this Chinese student?

The Soviet government had recruited five hundred communist students in China in the autumn, brought them to Moscow and trained them as communist propagandists at Moscow University, and then sent them back to China as such, where they were to spread communism among their people.

The same method is used everywhere. People are brought in from different parts of the world and continents, trained as propagandists and then sent back to their homeland, where they try to incite the people against their government and win them over to communism with their fiery, inflammatory speeches. No means are spared for this purpose, and the governments of many countries are naive enough not to notice this. They allow the Moscow executioners to carry on their criminal work in peace and conclude non-aggression pacts with people who spend day and night thinking about how they can undermine the state foundations of their allies and ignite the flame of revolution among them.

These five hundred Chinese came with great enthusiasm to red Moscow, the residence of the only free proletarian state in the world. Here, at the feet of the red professors, they wanted to sip communist wisdom in great draughts, and then return enriched to their poor, oppressed Chinese people and fight to the last drop of blood for their liberation. Communism was to bring them this freedom, and Moscow, the

beautiful, red Moscow, would show them the way to this paradise.

Now that they have studied in Moscow for half a year and have seen the hustle and bustle of communism up close, they dare to say something against the way in which Russian communism is being implemented. They say nothing against communism in general, because it is dear to them and they are and will remain ardent communists, but the cruel methods of Russian communism disgusts them, even their Asian hearts are outraged by this infamy, they dare to protest against it, and one hundred and fifty of them end up in the vaults of the Cheka.

This student is one of the one hundred and fifty. Like me, he is spending his first night in the hot room in the Lubyanka. He thinks back to his homeland, which he recently left with a full communist heart, he thinks of the ceremonial reception in red Moscow, of his first days at the East University. In his mind he can already see his poor, oppressed China, rejoicing in liberation under the red flags of communism, and now? Now he sits here behind bars in the Lubyanka, all his beautiful enthusiasm is gone, and in broken, jagged Russian the poor Chinese student's constricted, disappointed chest utters:

"Soviet Union? Two words! Behind lock and bolt? I would not have thought it."

Everyone looks with pity into the corner of the poor Chinese. Now and then a mocking smile crosses the pale face of the other prisoners. Only the rag-picker

does not allow himself to be disturbed and continues to snore quietly.

But now he too gets up, sits down, looks at us one by one and begins slowly and sarcastically: "Yes, the student came to Soviet Russia, wanted to taste freedom here. Now he has tasted it, the golden Soviet freedom."

"And the uncle there with the white beard," he continues, pointing to a venerable old Russian gentleman who is sitting on the ground, his grey head bowed low on his chest and heaving long, heavy sighs in his snow-white, patriarchal beard, "has hoarded gold. Now he can ponder here in the Lubyanka where he has buried his gold."

"And this German here," he continues, pointing to Brauer, "wanted to accumulate wealth here with us in order to export it to Germany. Now you are in Germany and can think about how best to invest your money, because the G.P.U. gives you plenty of time and leisure here."

"And this young teacher here," he says, pointing at me, "also wanted to go to Germany. The same fate has befallen him. Here you have your Germany, ha, ha, ha!

Now they will soon open up, we will go to the toilet, then they will give us some bread and tea, then the "Black Raven" will come and take one of us to Lubyanka No. 14, the other to Taganka (a large prison in Moscow for criminals), the third to Butyrki (the largest and most feared G.P.U. prison in Moscow for political criminals), and so we will all soon be separated from one another. The

“Black Raven” will find a good place for each of us."

"And who are you, why are you sitting here, and where will Black Raven take you?" one of us asks.

"Me? I'm a poor, uneducated rag-picker. I collect rags in Moscow, earn my two or three rubles a day, eat my fill, and get drunk on the rest. So it goes from day to day, I never worry about tomorrow, because every day brings me what I need. Once the militia found me drunk on the street and put me in prison. I spent two months in Butyrki, yesterday they brought me here, today I'm going to be released."

"How do you know that for sure?" someone asks.

"How do I know that? Hmm... that's simple; I'm not a harmful element. I'm a poor rag-picker, I just drink, and I'm going to be released again. If the "Black Raven" has brought you to this place, I will certainly be let out, because I am not a harmful element like you. I knew Lenin, I also know Stalin and Molotov, but you are enemies and pests of the Soviet government, you will not be released any time soon. Ha, ha, ha!"

Dressed in dirty rags, his long, black hair disheveled and uncombed, with a long, black, shaggy beard, unwashed face and hands, a swollen, red, drunkard's nose, he sits crouched on the ground, the free proletarian son of the Soviet government. He does not feel at all constrained by prison, because it is his convalescent home

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when his outdoor night camp in the open air becomes too cold. In summer he begs, collects rags, steals, drinks, spends the night in the open air in ditches, on piles of rubble or elsewhere in dark corners and holes where he can find at least some protection from the rain and storm. In late autumn or winter, when the snow covers everything with its white shroud and the thermometer drops to twenty or thirty degrees below zero, and even the rag-picker is no longer comfortable outside, he gets drunk, lies down on the pavement, makes a deal with the militia who want to drive him out of here, curses and swears, behaves like a mad animal, is thrown into prison and spends the cold Russian winter in prison, is at home everywhere and in all circumstances, fears neither the militia nor the G.P.U. and lives like the birds under the sky.

We know he is right and we envy him for his fate, for his freedom, which will soon be his, while his grim prophecies hovers over our heads and will surely come true.

The door opens, tea and bread are handed in, and we have breakfast. The first prophesy comes true. We keep waiting.

The door opens again. The overseer comes in, holding a piece of paper in his hand and writes down two names.

The people called must come with him. "The Black Raven," says the rag-and-bone smuggler calmly.

The door opens again, and again two people must come with him.

"If only we were taken away together!" Brauer and I wish.

One couple after the other is called away.

The door opens again and the guard reads:

"Fast!"

"Here!"

"Brauer!"

"Here!"

"Come with your things!"

We quickly gather together our knapsacks and hurry out. The Chekist gives orders from behind us, he never goes first, but always follows behind with a loaded revolver, ready to fire.

When we get to the door, there is a large, black vehicle, wide open at the back, waiting. It is the famous "Black Raven".

"Get in, no questions asked!" a Chekist yells in a thunderous voice as we shyly put our feet over the threshold.

We disappear quickly and silently into the jaws of the "Black Raven," where our fellow sufferers from dog cell number 4 are waiting for us. More and more couples come in until the car is finally full. It is pitch black inside and you can't see anything. The door is slammed, a Chekist sits down in front of it, the other sits next to the driver, and the “Black Raven” starts moving. It is used to transport prisoners and those condemned to death, and many a person has already taken their last ride in it. A small lamp flashes above our heads and dimly illuminates our room.

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The ragman's second prophecy comes true.

Where will they take us?

Some say to Butyrki. The Black Raven makes a couple of turns and stops.

"Lubyanka No. 14!" explains an expert.

He is right. We are called out in pairs and locked in a completely empty room, the so-called collection room. There are about twenty of us. We all pace impatiently up and down like trapped animals in a cage. A large Ukrainian farmer throws himself into a corner and groans. Then a small, square hole opens in the door and we are handed our lunch. It consists of soup and porridge and doesn't taste too bad. Then we are called out again in pairs and we are photographed from the front and from the side with a number at our chest. Woe betide anyone whose picture ends up in the G.P.U. files. He is lost, even if he is released again. The G.P.U. will not let him out of its sight, because he is branded for destruction. Even if he is let go once more, he is not free; the G.P.U.'s sharp eye follows him wherever he flees, until one day a heavy, cold hand is placed on his shoulder and the mysterious words are whispered: "G.P.U. Come with me, citizen!" His blood runs cold in his veins, he follows the G.P.U. without will, like a trembling, helpless mouse follows the staring, greedy gaze of the snake and then disappears into its jaws.

After the photographs are taken, we are examined. We have to take off everything, except our shirts, every seam, every sock, every shoe is felt and examined,

to see whether there is a piece of paper hidden somewhere. Then we are distributed among the cells. Brauer and I are put in a cell together.

The first night we lie on the floor because all the wooden slat beds are occupied. In the Lubyanka prisons there is always a dead silence. The guards stand in the corridors like lifeless statues, the prisoners only speak in whispers. The floor is made of parquet because the building used to be the administrative building of an insurance company. The windows are closed almost to the top with thick iron shutters and only the top panes are exposed. As a result, there is always an unpleasant half-darkness in the cells.

Outside you can hear the heavy footsteps of the guards walking up and down day and night. On the wall hangs a piece of paper with ten long rules, one of which reads: "Looking out is strictly forbidden, and the guards will shoot without warning at any face that appears at the window!"

Here, too, there is a small, square hole in the door through which the prisoners are given their food. In the morning, each prisoner is given a piece of bread that is to last the whole day, at lunch and dinner a bowl of millet groats, and also tea in the morning and evening and three sugar cubes every day. The food is the same every day, but plentiful, so that you don't exactly go hungry in the Lubyanka.

My interrogation

On the second day, at 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening, the door opens, the guard comes in, reads out my name and says:

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"Follow me to the interrogation!"

We go through several corridors, sometimes right, sometimes left, sometimes up the stairs. The guard walking behind me only gives orders in short, sharp words:

"Forward, right, forward, left, forward, straight ahead, up the stairs, etc."

"Stop!" he finally shouts in a dark corridor in front of a door.

The guard knocks. "Come in!"

We enter and find ourselves in front of the examining magistrate.

He is a very young man, about twenty-two or twenty-three years old. The room is strangely lit in a mysterious way, there are large cabinets with files on the walls, and in one corner, behind a green table, apparently deeply immersed in the files, sits a small, unassuming man.

Now he raises his piercing eyes, invites me to sit down in a friendly manner, exchanges a few words with the guard and then dismisses him. I have sat down on a chair opposite him. My heart beats restlessly and I sigh to God for strength and power.

He takes a sheet of paper and begins. First, he writes down when and where I, my family, my parents and siblings were born, where I lived since childhood and what I did.

After all these formal questions, he straightens up, fixes his eyes on me and asks slowly:

"Tell me, why are you actually arrested?"

"I don't know myself."

"You have no idea?"

"No, I am not aware of any guilt."

"Think carefully, don't you really know anything? You must have been arrested for some reason, the G.P.U. doesn't arrest anyone innocent. Just try a little, you'll come up with something."

"No, I don't know anything."

"Really nothing? Well, let's see. Tell me, do you believe in God?"

"Yes."

"Do you firmly believe in God?"

"Yes."

He stares at me for a long time again.

"Why did your wife come back to you? We sent her to Siberia."

"What should she do there alone? She wanted to be back with her husband and her terminally ill child."

"Wanted to go to her child? Ha, ha, ha, wanted to go to her child! I have children too, if they die today, it's all the same to me!"

"But not all people think like that, especially not a mother."

"Do you love your wife and child?"

"Of course I love them."

"Do you love them very much?"

"Of course."

"Good, we will banish you to the far north, we will also banish your wife and child!"

"You can do that, you have the power, but then you will destroy us innocents, because we have done nothing but to ask to leave Russia legally

to move to America, where we have relatives."

"But you are innocent! As innocent as a newborn child! Completely innocent! And then you're a teacher! Shame on you! Tell me, do you still want to emigrate now?"

"Of course, if you let us out, I still want to emigrate now."

"He still wants to emigrate now and wants to force his emigration at any price," he then writes in the report. "Now let's see how things are with your agitation. Tell me, what is your attitude towards the Soviet government? Did you praise it?"

"No!"

"Did you despise it?"

"Not that either."

"What, you neither praised nor despised it? That's not right. What did you do? You took water in your mouth? Tell me, have you ever despised a representative of the Soviet government and spoken about him, even if not publicly, at village meetings, perhaps just once?"

That is a fateful question, but I answer truthfully: "Yes, I did."

"About whom?"

I name a name.

"Why did you speak about him, and why were you dissatisfied with him?"

"Because he illegally branded me a kulak,

because according to the regulations I do not belong in that category."

"Where did you talk about him?"

"At home, among my parents and siblings."

"So you had a counter-revolutionary nest in your house. How many cows did you have?"

"Three."

"How many horses?"

"Three as well."

"Name a poor farmer from your village."

I name one.

"How many horses and cows did he have?"

For us German farmers, the difference between "rich" and "poor" was no longer so great, because there had long been no real "rich" people, they had all been eliminated in the first years of the revolution. Nobody had to be poor, because everyone who wanted to work had clothes and bread. But the government had divided the farmers into three classes: poor, middle and rich. The latter were also called kulaks, and they were subject to exile and extermination. They were the most honest, hardworking farmers, who were by no means rich, but who, through their hard work and industriousness, had their farms in the best order and also provided the state with the most taxes and grain. They usually had no more arable land than the middle and poor farmers.

The Chekist had probably expected that the poor farmer I would name, would have had nothing. If a poor farmer in Soviet Russia had nothing by the start of the Five-Year Plan, when for twelve years he had all the rights,

all credits and all aids of the government at his disposal; this was the best proof that he himself was to blame for his poverty. These poor people were mostly lazybones who never wanted to work, who relied on credits and help from the government, who had never used their own hands to work and who would never do so. There were few such poor farmers among us Germans.

When the examining magistrate now hears that the poor farmer only had one horse and one cow less than I did, he is a little taken aback and says: "Then they should have taken the third cow from you and given it to that one."

"They could have done that if they had wanted to."

I had to remember that they had not just taken the one cow from us, but all three and everything else too.

The interrogation lasted almost until the morning. Then he read me the report and asked me to sign it. I pointed out a few expressions that he had written differently than I had said. The little things he changed, but he didn't change the sentence "He also wants to emigrate and wants to force his emigration at any cost."

“I didn’t say it like that.”

"How did you say then?"

"I said that if you gave me the passport, I would emigrate immediately, but I didn't say that I wanted to force my emigration at any cost."

"Yes, you said that. Here you sign the minutes!"

"No, I won't sign until you change the sentence!"

"What, you don't want to sign? Don't you know who I am and where you are?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you still don't want to sign?"

"No, because I said something different than what you wrote. Change the sentence to what I said, then I'll sign."

"Here, sign now!"

"No, I won't sign!"

"What, should I call a soldier? Have you completely forgotten where you are? Don't you know that I can do whatever I want with you?"

He gets angrier and more threatening. Finally I think: Why are you going to get worked up here for so long? In the end, it's all the same, because you're lost anyway. Sign and you can go.

"Nu ladno, (what’s the difference) , give it to me, I'll sign it," I finally say.

"Who are you talking to here, that you say 'ladno' so disparagingly?" and another angry tirade follows.

I let him rant quietly, take the report, sign my name to it, to finally be released. He calls the guard and says to him: "Take this Molodetz (derogatorily - good fellow) away from me!"

Soon after that I am in my room, the others are already asleep. I feel as if I have been dealing with a demon, so shocked have I been by the various statements that the Chekist made during the interrogation.

It was not until morning that I fell into a restless sleep.

After two days I was called in for another interrogation. This time it was only for a short time. They mainly want to know whether I had been to the German consulate. I really hadn't been there, out of fear of the G.P.U., but they probably don't believe me.

"Just wait, you'll tell us something else. We'll give you time to think about it!"

With these words the examining magistrate hands me back to the guard, who leads me back to my cell. "Well, how is it that you're back so quickly?" my fellow sufferers ask in surprise.

I briefly described the course of the interrogation. While I was still telling the story, the door opened, the guard called my name and said: "Gather your things!"

The person in question is not told anything more. He only knows that he isn't coming here again, but where he was going is a mystery to him. It may be freedom, which rarely happens, it may mean another prison, it may mean exile or even execution.

"Ssobirajssya s veschami!" (Gather your things!) How much anxious hope, but even more fear and terror, these few words arouse in the heart of the prisoner. How longingly they wait in prison for these two words, for they are supposed to bring the long-awaited, golden freedom. The prisoner waits weeks, months, sometimes even years for these three words,

and when they are finally called out to him, all that awaits them is usually exile or even death. "Gather your things!" Who of the inhabitants of the G.P.U. prisons do not know these words!

"You will be free now!" say my fellow sufferers.

"If you are free, please go to the German consulate and report that I am here," Brauer pleads.

"What are you thinking, they would arrest me again immediately and I would certainly be lost. No, that is not possible, but I will send a postcard, perhaps it will arrive. By the way, I am certain that I'm not going to freedom."

"Yes, yes, you will be free. If you only have such a short interrogation and then immediately receive the message: "Gather your things!" you will usually be freed!"

Oh, how I would like to hope. Perhaps you will really be free, I dare to think. But no, no, that can't be. The examining magistrate said quite unequivocally: "We will banish you, your wife and your child."

"Come with me!" comes the command from the guard soon after. A brief handshake from my fellow sufferers, who congratulate me on my freedom, and I follow. We walk through a corridor; he opens a door and pushes me in.

It is the assembly room, and I know that it is not going to freedom, but to the Butyrki. About ten men are already inside. Again and again

the door opens, and each time someone new is shoved in.

Just now it is a young man of about thirty. He looks around wildly and when he sees where he is, he throws himself into a corner and bursts into loud tears. I go to him and ask who he is. He is a Volga German farmer. He secretly left his wife and child and went to Moscow to inquire at the German embassy whether it might be possible to emigrate to Germany. He is allowed to enter the embassy, but when he comes out, he is arrested and locked up in the Lubyanka. He is interrogated for a week. Then comes the infamous: "Gather your things!" "Now you will be free!" his cellmates also say to him, he believes it and is happy to be free now. But when he is pushed into our collection room, he knows that instead of freedom he is going to the Butyrki. That is why he is now lying in the corner and crying so heartbreakingly. He knows he will probably never see his family again.

I try to console him. For a long time he doesn't want to be consoled, but finally he becomes quiet, stands up and doesn't leave my side. "If only we could be together in the same room in the Butyrki!" is his only wish now.

Butyrki

Soon the "Black Raven" comes and takes us to the Butyrki in the usual way. There are seventeen of us, we are registered and searched again, and then we go off to the cells. "If only we could stay together!" we two Germans wish.

They open a room and put nine of us in, open the second and push the others in, including the Volga German and me. The room is about eight meters long and five meters wide. The resting places [Lagerplätze] are set up on both sides. The room has twenty-four folding beds [Klappenstellen], which are connected to each other by unfinished boards of unequal thickness laid over them. Crowded together, the prisoners have to sleep here. Of course they are not given mattresses, blankets or pillows. Anyone who has brought something with them can lie on them, but many only have the clothes they were wearing when they were arrested. They take off their outer clothes, make a bed out of them, put a cap under their head and cover themselves with their coats. But there are also some among us who do not even have a coat and only sleep in the clothes they are wearing.

The resting places run along the walls on both sides, with a narrow corridor in the middle. Everything is full, there is even someone lying on the floor in the aisle. I go to him and recognize him as an old Jew with whom I spent one night in a cell in the Lubyanka. He came to the Butyrki a few days earlier and already knows what's going on. He shows us loose boards under the resting areas, which we pull out, lay on the cement floor, spread our clothes over them and go to sleep.

"Proverka!" (inspection) echoes through the long corridor at seven o'clock the next morning. All the prisoners get up from their beds and line up two by two. The cell elder counts us and

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stands at the door. When it opens, the commandant comes in with a guard.

"How many prisoners are in this cell?" he turns to the cell elder.

"Fifty-five, two are in the hospital, two are being interrogated, fifty-one here in the cell!" is the quick response.

They quickly walk up and down the rows and count: "One, two, three, four". .. twenty-five pairs and one, fifty-one correct."

The commander writes it down on the list and leaves the room.

After the count, we are all allowed into the toilet at the same time. The toilet is divided into two halves. In the first there is running water for washing. Four long lines form in both sections in a flash.

Three times a day we are allowed into the toilet. In the meantime, three large metal buckets, the so-called “paraschen”, stand at the door of our room. Sometimes they are filled to the brim, overflow and pollute all the air in the room. The prisoners have to empty and wash them out in the toilet three times a day. The camp beds begin right next to the "paraschen", and the first one of the plank beds is only a meter away from this pestilent bucket.

If you don't have a towel to dry yourself with, you have to let the air dry your skin after washing, the prisoners are not given towels. But I also saw a prisoner divide the only towel he had and give half to someone who didn't have one. When people lie together in a crucible of suffering, they become closer,

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they feel more connected and help each other much more than when they are free.

When we return to the cell, we receive bread and hot water. Each prisoner receives about 250 to 300 grams of bread a day. Some eat it all straight away for breakfast. At lunchtime, there is a thin soup with just a few potatoes and some meat scraps in it. I still feel sick today when I think about the foul-smelling soup. Under normal circumstances, it would be impossible to eat it, but we prisoners were given nothing else and had to spoon it up bravely.

At lunchtime, a large tin bowl of this soup is placed outside the cell door for every ten men, and as soon as the key turns in the lock, the deputies from each group of ten run to the door, accompanied by the shouts of their comrades: "Eat, jackals!" The soup is brought in, ten men group themselves around each bowl and start spooning it up. But there is only one table in the cell, around which ten men can stand, one group; the others have to eat in their resting areas. Everyone has to have their own spoon. Anyone who hasn't brought one with them can buy a wooden spoon in the prison shop. Anyone who has no money gets one from the poor box.

After the meal, you can see a ten-rayed sun made of spilled soup at every place where the bowls were. When someone once painted a radiant soup sun on my bunk, I said a few words about how there were other ways to eat. "What do you think – you're at home!" "He wants cleanliness here too!" and similar things buzzed around my ears.

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In silence, the spilled soup was wiped up on the floor and I didn't say another word about it.

In the afternoon there is hot water for tea again, at five in the evening a couple of spoons full of groats or beans and hot water again. Again, ten men have to spoon groats and beans out of a bowl, just like at lunch.

In the morning, the prisoners can walk around the prison yard outside for a quarter of an hour. This is surrounded by thick walls as high as a house. However, it is strictly forbidden to come into contact with prisoners from other cells. The prisoners in the cells are not allowed to look out of the window and those walking around outside are not allowed to look up at the windows. If someone violates this rule, we are banned from the store for a few weeks. Two heavily armed guards watch us the whole time.

The free time in the prison is filled with reading, playing and sleeping. Twice a month the starosta (Kammerältester/cell elder) receives books from the prison library for the prisoners to read. The books are mostly good ones and from the old Tsarist era. I even once had a religious book in which an American missionary describes his missionary journeys in Africa. When the religious books were sorted out, this book was probably mistaken for a scientific travelogue, and that is why it remained.

After the evening meal, the prisoners in the cell become restless and begin to walk up and down the aisle. Everyone has their own thoughts, everyone is brooding

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about his own fate. When you watch the prisoners wandering back and forth at dusk, you can't help but think of the wild animals that wander back and forth in their cages for hours. Nobody trusts their neighbors, because even here in prison you are not safe from spying. In every cell the G.P.U. has its spies, who only appear to share the same fate as the other prisoners. When a newcomer comes in, these spies immediately make their way to him, and before he knows it, they find out everything about him. There were two of these spies in our cell. One was named Vasilyev, but it may have been a false name.

When I was in Butyrki the first day, he came to me and tried to learn as much as he could about me. He is well acquainted with the German emigration movement, spent a long time in the inner prison of the Lubyanka with leading men of this movement, and asked if I knew them. I asked him their names. He said he had forgotten them, but he would probably remember them and tell me. Shortly afterwards, the other prisoners pointed out to me that Vasilyev was an informer, so that I would be on my guard against him.

The fate of such informers is not one to envy in most cases. They are often prisoners too, and they are promised freedom if they have worked as informers for the G.P.U. in prisons for a certain period of time, but they are usually banished or shot when they have done their job and are no longer needed.

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The most terrifying were the long, agonizing nightly interrogations. There was a Polish architect in our cell who was interrogated by three G.P.U. men every night for a whole month. These cross-examinations with threats of being shot and the sleepless nights had brought him to the point where he signed everything that was put in front of him because he no longer knew what he was doing. As a result, he brought about twenty men into misfortune because he had accused them of spying for Poland with his forced signature. When they finally let him out of these long interrogations into our cell, he threw himself onto his woodpile, pulled his hair back and whimpered like a dog: "Oh, what have I done, these people are all innocent, just like me, they have done nothing wrong, and I have innocently plunged them into ruin!"

He entered an appeal and recanted, because he had not made the statements in full consciousness. Then he was interrogated again for several nights until he signed everything again. He was already half insane.

All prisoners were divided into two groups: the wealthy and the poor. The former included prisoners who either received food from their relatives or had a money receipt. The money a prisoner had with him was taken from him on admission and he was given a receipt. They could then buy food, bread rolls, canned goods etc. in the prison store. The second group included those prisoners who neither had such a receipt nor received food from their relatives. Many of them had relatives far away,

for example, my family that was 800 kilometers from Moscow.

The prisoners had introduced the nice custom among themselves that the wealthy paid ten percent of everything they received into the poor fund for the poor. This fund was administered by a chairman elected by the poor themselves.

Twice a week was shopping day for our cell. The starosta and his assistant then collected the order slips and receipts from the prisoners. Then they took a wooden box and went shopping with the poor people’s agent. Two of the prisoners were also allowed to go with them each time. When they returned with the full box, the goods and receipts were distributed to those who had ordered. On the back of the receipts, the credit balance was reduced by the amount of the person's purchase.

Once the wealthy had received their share, the poor people's representative called the poor in, showed them what he had bought for the money from the poor box and discussed with them how it should be distributed. It was usually not much, two or three rolls each, but we were royally pleased with these delicacies.

The poor box, to which we owed these small pleasures of prison life, was, as already mentioned, not a matter for the prison administration, but a custom that had once been introduced by prisoners. They came and went, but the beautiful institution remained, and everyone had to comply. Once there was a quarrel. Some of the wealthy

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did not want to give their contribution to the poor box, but declared that they already shared their food with their neighbors. As with many disputes, it came to a vote. Those of us without means were not allowed to vote. However, it was decided almost unanimously to retain the previous custom, and everyone had to comply with this decision. The decision was: "If someone wants to give something to his poor neighbor, that is his private matter, but he must first give the ten percent to the general poor relief fund."

Twice monthly prisoners were allowed to write letters. The cell elder then collected them and handed them to the prison guard, who took them to the examining magistrate. There, they were left. I wrote every time, but my family never received one of these letters.

A prisoner who had already spent a whole winter in Butyrki asked the examining magistrate during a night interrogation how it was that he had not received any news of his family. "Yes, I simply didn't forward all your correspondence, but put it in your files, where it is carefully stored," was the mocking reply.

During my entire stay in the Moscow prisons, only once did one of us receive a card containing only a simple greeting.

The uncertainty about the fate of the families left behind is the greatest torture for the prisoners.

We all found our imprisonment on Easter Eve particularly oppressive.

It is a beautiful, quiet spring evening. I sit at the barred window and look out at the setting sun.

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On the hard wooden plank beds lie my fellow sufferers, lost in gloomy thoughts. One and the other quietly hums a song to themselves. Singing aloud is strictly forbidden, but even from these soft melodies of mourning you can hear all the great pain of the torn Russian heart.

My thoughts fly through the strong bars to my loved ones, and the longing for them and for precious freedom squeezes the first tears from my eyes. A few large, heavy drops suddenly roll slowly down my face. I quickly wipe them away, grit my teeth and turn away from the window. I have never been a friend of tears and have always considered it unworthy of a man to cry. They were my first and last tears in the Butyrki. Easter comes and goes. Easter, the resurrection feast of our glorious Savior. If Easter were not here, if we did not have the hope of the resurrection from the dead, then we would be the most miserable of the miserable, and especially we who languish and suffer in prison precisely for the sake of this faith.

The whole of nature outside, freedom, beckons so much, it is so beautiful, so lovely, but we cannot get out. Barred windows, iron doors, thick, high walls and heavily armed guards restrain us. There is no escape for us, no rescue, no freedom. Behind us a lost life, in front of us death and destruction. Blessed is he who in such hours has a secure hold on the Risen One. He may tremble, but he does not despair; he may doubt, but he does not despair, for the resurrection sun must rise for him again and again,

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and even in the darkest cellar vault he still sees a distant star of hope, which shines its dim but undoubted light into his earthly darkness and gives his wounded soul new strength and courage to face life again.

On the second Easter eve, I get my place on the wooden plank beds near the infamous paraschen. "I'd rather lie on the floor and give up my place there until I get a place on the wooden plank beds," I say.

"Everyone has to sleep there, and if you don't take your turn, you'll lose your right to a better place and have to lie on the floor!" the starost's assistant replies. I press my lips together and go to my place. If everyone has to lie there, I don't want to create an exception. The prisoners always wash their laundry in this place, so it's particularly busy, the air near the paraschen is terrible, but I have good nerves and soon fall asleep.

New prisoners arrive at night, including two Germans, both of whom have been torn away from their families quite suddenly.

One of them is a former preacher, and I was able to spend many a blessed hour with this brother on the hard wooden plank beds. We often talked about God's word in the twilight hours. We didn't have a Bible or a New Testament, but we recalled the words of God that we knew by heart, talked about them and feasted on them.

One morning when we got up,

there are two Russian brothers among the new arrivals during the night. Their house of prayer had been closed and they would gather in their homes with two or three families and contemplate God's word over a cup of tea. The G.P.U. sought out such secret Bible studies and arrested the participants. These two brothers were also found at such a small Bible study at Easter and arrested.

The next day they were separated from each other so that they would not be together. So only one of them stayed with us. He had taken a Bible with him, but it had been taken from him. Now the three of us were one in faith. Unfortunately, the Russian brother soon fell ill and was sent to the prison hospital. When he later came back to us in our room, he always shared the food he got from his wife with us.

One day, a young Russian came up to me and asked if we were brothers.

"No, we are not brothers."

"Are you close relatives or good acquaintances?"

"No, we are neither relatives nor acquaintances, but all three of us have met here in this room for the first time in our lives."

"What, you saw each other here in prison for the first time? How is it that Petrov always shares his food with you?"

"Yes, we are brothers in the Lord, and that is more than physical brothers."

He can't understand that this and goes to one side, shaking his head, but I think of the Savior's words:

"Truly I say to you: There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold, now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands in the midst of persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life." (Mark 10, 29-30)

It is the end of April, 9 o'clock in the evening. The door opens, a Chekist enters with a small piece of paper in his hand and tries in vain to decipher a name. It seems to me that it must be my name, so I tell him my name.

"Right, that's you. Come with me to the examining magistrate!"

"Should I take my things with me?"

"No, it's here in the Butyrki and won't take long."

I lead the way; he commands from behind. We walk through various long corridors, cross the courtyard once and finally end up in a barren, unattractive, empty room. There is no one there and I have to take a seat.

Soon afterwards, the examining magistrate I already know appears. He used to be in plain clothes, now he's in Chekist uniform. "Well, Gerhard Gerhardovitsch (the politest form of address in Russia), how are you?" he asks in a friendly manner.

"Bad!"

"Yes, then you must live according to the law, then it will be better, and you need not languish in prison."

"I also live according to the law."

"Yes, now that we have nabbed you by the collar, you want to live legally, but you should have done that earlier, now it is already too late."

"I have not done anything illegal."

"But we think differently. Listen to me!" He reads out my accusation to me, which reads:

"G. G. Fast, disenfranchised, anti-Soviet, came to Moscow to emigrate, then stayed here for the winter, founded a counter-revolutionary nest, agitated for emigration among Germans throughout Russia and supplied them with emigration materials. Therefore, according to paragraph 58, item 10, he is accused of counter-revolution."

I stand there as if struck by lightning. This accusation carries with it a penalty of exile for 3 to 10 years or being executed, as far as I know. The accusations were completely made up. I had stayed near Moscow while the others were all forcibly sent back, but had received permission from the militia to do so, kept quiet all winter, had no contact with the other Germans in Russia, except with my parents, to whom I wrote clearly and unambiguously that they should get ready to sow, because emigration was out of the question.

I reply to this shameless, completely unfounded accusation that was hurled at me:

"I have done none of the things you are accusing me of!"

"We will investigate the matter and prove that you have done it. If we find that you are innocent

we will release you, otherwise you will face punishment."

I, the fool, still believe that I will get away, because the investigation will prove my innocence. I still do not believe that they will simply condemn me and banish me without any further investigation.

I have to sign that my accusation has been read to me and am led back to the cell.

A few days later, the Volga German farmer and one of the two Germans who arrived later were called out, and I never heard from them again.

We were cut off from the world. No newspapers, no letters brought us news of the outside world. Only when new prisoners came in did we bombard them with questions about what was going on outside.

The prisoners in the different cells were not allowed to communicate with each other either. But they had invented various means of communication.

Their newspapers were the walls in the toilet. If there was a name with three crosses next to it, we knew that the person had died. One day we found the following verse on the wall in the toilet:

> "And if the world were full of devils
> and wanted to devour us,
> we would not be afraid,
> we would still succeed."

This verse, which a German from another cell had written, cheered us up very much, I added something to it and wrote my name under it. The next time I found the question:

"Are you Fast from Lubyanka No. 14, Cell 12?" Brauer."

I replied again that it was me, and we had made contact. But we could not always decipher the inscriptions on the wall, because they were often erased with chalk or something else. The prison guards were supposed to destroy the inscriptions after each visit to the privy, but were probably too lazy and did not always do so.

Others wrote little notes and hid them in the privy. The others spoke to their acquaintances from other cells using sign language.

Opposite the lavatory stood the oldest tower of the Butyrki with its the terrible solitary cells. Stenka Razin, a great rebel, had been imprisoned in this tower in 1668 before his execution. Every evening when we were in the lavatory, a woman appeared at the window of a cell in this tower and spoke fervently using sign language with a Tatar in our cell. There were two Tatars in our cell. They had belonged to a secret counter-revolutionary Tatar organization and had been imprisoned for eleven months. They had wanted to break away from the Bolsheviks and establish an independent Tartar kingdom. This conspiracy was discovered and a thousand men were arrested. They were almost exclusively communists.

One day, while we were walking, a small ball suddenly fell out of one of the windows below us.

Discreetly the next person picks it up. It is a small ball of dough or breadcrumbs. He opens it and finds a small note inside, it is given to the addressee. The dough is made from fresh breadcrumbs. The prisoners used these for various purposes. For example, a whole chess game was very artfully glued together from these crumbs and the pieces were painted black and white.

Then pigeons were fed on the windowsill and made so tame that they could be picked up with the hands. At first I didn't know why some prisoners went to so much trouble with these pigeons. Later I found out that they were used as carrier pigeons.

I cannot mention all the means of communication used by the prisoners here, but I would like to remind you of one, which Vladimir Brunovsky, who also spent over four years in Lubyanka and Butyrki, tells in his book "In Soviet Prisons".

When he goes to the doctor one day, he addresses a nurse there as an old acquaintance, rushes towards her, and before she knows it, he has given her a kiss. At the same time, he pushes a small, balled-up piece of paper into her mouth with his tongue. The lady understands the kiss and forwards the note. Brunovsky is scolded for allowing himself to kiss a lady in Butyrki, but what does it matter, the kiss is given and the purpose is achieved.

Of course, the G.P.U. tries in every possible way to discover and prevent the prisoners' secret connections, but they are fighting a life-and-death battle, which makes one inventive and sharpens the mind.

My verdict

It is mid-May. A beautiful, warm spring day beckons us to freedom. The more beautiful nature outside, the more painful it is for the prisoner behind his thick, gloomy prison walls.

In the afternoon I lie down for a nap. I may have slept for an hour when I suddenly hear my name called. When I look up, I see the prison door wide open and the prison warden standing in the doorway. He is holding two small pieces of paper in his hand and calls out loudly: "Fast, G.!"

I quickly jump up, slip on the rubber shoes that are waiting for me and rush to the door. "Verdict! Verdict!" shout my comrades. Everyone rushes to the door and becomes as quiet as a mouse, because they know that a verdict is about to be read out.

"Are you G. Fast?" asks the prison warden.

"Yes."

He then reads out my verdict in a loud voice:

"G. Fast is sentenced by the council of the N.G.P.U. to five years in a concentration camp for counter-revolutionary activities."

I have to sign that I have been informed of the verdict. Then he reads out another verdict, which is for ten years in a concentration camp and applies to an old, gray postmaster who had been in office for over twenty-five years.

I quickly borrow a pen and paper from a fellow sufferer standing next to me and write down the number and date of my verdict. I still have this paper. My sentence started on the day of

my arrest. It was my birthday, which I had to spend in the hot cell.

The door closes and we can think about our fate. I walk up and down the cell with strong steps. The others are all still silent or are talking quietly about the terrible fate that has befallen us.

Five years of exile in a concentration camp! A cruel sentence. But no, I cannot, I will not spend five years in a concentration camp. Impossible! What madness inspires people that they can destroy my whole life in the best years with the stroke of a pen!

The Polish architect, whom the G.P.U. brought to the brink of madness through long nightly interrogations, is sitting on the wooden plank bed with my friend, the former German preacher, and is talking to him about my sentence. I go over to them.

"Oh, how terrible, how cruel your sentence is!" says the architect compassionately.

I answer him: "Everything is in God's hands, and so am I. It has not yet been decided that I will serve five years, because God can release me before the time."

He looks at me in surprise.

"How? The sentence has already been passed; how can you still hope?"

"Everything is in God's hands, if He wants to, He can release me, even in spite of the G.P.U., because He is more powerful, and even the G.P.U. can and may only do what He allows."

He cannot understand this.

When I spoke to him again about his soul's salvation during my last days in prison, he said: "Everything is so beautiful with you. You have such a wonderful faith. But what will it be like when you three are no longer here? Then I must despair, because the others are all so cold and unkind."

The three of us often spoke about his soul's salvation, but he did not seem to understand. His wife and child were his idols, and the fact that he was now going to lose them drove him to despair.

"Oh, my wife! Oh, my dear little boy! I will never see your lovely, lovely face again!" he cried in despair, grabbed his head, threw himself on his bed and cried like a child. With his lamentations and whining he showed the hopeless situation of a person without inner stability, without faith, without God, when the thing he loves most is taken from him.

But I too could not sleep the first night after the verdict was read out. Again and again, as soon as I had fallen asleep, I woke up in shock from my restless sleep.

Five years! Five years away from wife and child! Five years of exile! Five long years of not seeing my loved ones again! Oh God, why, why? Five years! What madness to destroy the lives of three happy people with the stroke of a pen, because five years in a concentration camp is death, slow, painful death. And my wife and my child! What will they live on? They only had a few months left to live at most, and then they will starve. No, these can no longer be people who systematically and cold-heartedly

destroy the lives of millions in this way. If only they had shot all three of us outside Moscow! One shot, one bang, and it would have been all over. But now, five years! No, no, impossible! No one can be so cruel, it's a dream. But no, I know it quite definitely and clearly, he read: five years. What rage, what tyrants!

I suddenly get up from my wood bench. A lamp dimly illuminates the sleeping prisoners. That old postmaster also tosses and turns restlessly. He got even more years than I did. But does it make any difference whether it's five or ten years?

Oh, how everything inside me is outraged at this cruelty. If only I and all the others had at least done something wrong, but we are innocent. We have done nothing, only quietly earned our daily bread by the sweat of our brow, and now we are condemned to death for it.

I want to jump up and shout out loud into the dark night what is tearing my full chest apart, I want to crush them, tear them to pieces, these raging tyrants! The thick walls, the black barred windows look at me indifferently, and outside the heavy footsteps of the guards echo in the long corridor. It is as if they are mocking my anger, for what can I do against these thick walls, these bars and the clanking sabers [Säbel] of the Chekists, poor condemned prisoner that I am!

Weak and powerless, I sink back onto my bed. Beside me sleeps my fellow sufferer, the German preacher,

his head on his fur hat, in which he has placed a few books to make it a little higher. His coat and trousers are his mattress, and he has covered himself with his coat. That is how he was arrested, and that is how he has to sleep. I have at least taken a pillow and a thin blanket with me on the advice of the Chekist who arrested me.

Across from us on the other bed the Pole is crying and whining. He too cannot sleep, because he knows that he too will never see his loved ones again. Poor Pole! If only you had at least something to hold on to in God!

The suffering of others makes me forget my own for a moment, and I fall into a restless sleep again, until I wake up again at dawn, frightened, with the horrible thought: "Five years!"

The next day, a Saturday, I find rest in God and can be still in the Lord. It is He who lays it on us, it is He who also helps us to bear it.

On Sunday afternoon the preacher is called out and his accusation is read to him: "Agitation according to paragraph 58, item 10.

My Exile

Four days later. "Today I am exiled," I say to my fellow sufferer Funk as we take our walk in the prison yard. "How do you know that for sure?" "I don't know for sure, but today is Tuesday, the day of exile, and I have a strong feeling that I am going today. It is probably the last time I walk around here with you."

I am completely calm inside. That night was difficult, very difficult, but now I have gotten over it. I am not afraid of exile. I know it is coming today, but it has lost its sting for me. As God wills, I think, and calmly face the things to come. My ways, my life are in His hands, and nothing more than He allows can happen to me, I think, and that gives me comfort and strength.

Today is our store day. I go to the store to buy something for the trip, but only get two needles.

It is shortly before lunch. There are only about three men in the room, the others are all in the toilet. Then the door opens, the guard comes in and reads out my name. I answer.

"Gather your things!"

Then he leaves.

"Fast, my family is in Germany!" Brauer shouts through the peephole into my room. "And I'm being banished for five years today!" I shout back. He doesn't hear it because he's already disappeared. He was just being led past our room and hurried ahead to call out the good news that his family had been saved.

The old Jew who I was with in the Lubyanka and whom I also met here on the first night gives me cold tea and a few sugary sweets, and I quickly drink and eat a little more.

Now the other prisoners come back to the room and they all shake my hand warmly as they say goodbye. The farewell from

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the two brothers is particularly heartfelt. The Russian brother puts a fish and two rolls in my pocket that he got from his wife.

The door opens. "Fast, are you ready?"

"Yes."

I silently shake hands with the brothers standing next to me. "Goodbye, Brother Fast, if not here, then up there in the light!" they say.

I take my blanket and pillow under my arm, because that's all I have. One last handshake, one last wave, and the prison door closes behind me forever. The German preacher and I have often asked ourselves: "When will the hour come when we too go through the door for the last time?" Now it is here for me, even if it is completely different from what I imagined and wished for. Things in our lives so often turn out completely differently than we imagine, and that was the case this time too.

"When will the hour come?" How often and by how many people is this question not asked in life? Be of good cheer, poor human heart, one day the hour will surely come, which you have longed for, which you have waited for, even if it may be completely different from what you expected and wished for. But it will come, trust in Him, the ruler of your destiny, your path, then it will surely bring you salvation, even if you had imagined it completely differently. He does not spoil anything, He knows what He is doing. Yes, one day it will come, the hour when you will receive a blessed "therefore" for all your questions, for all your "whys".

My time, my hour, when the thick iron prison door opened and closed for me for the last time, had come. My path was indeed different than I had always thought when I said "when," and I did not know why, but today I know, for if this path had not come, I would not be sitting in Germany now, I would not be free. I know it now, but back then it was still hidden from my eyes, and only a dark, horrifying night and a terrible abyss opened before me. Not all questions are answered so clearly here, but one day in eternity everything will be clear and understandable to us, why we had to go this way and not another. But here it is still hidden from our eyes, and we ask with an anxious sigh: "Lord, why?" Be calm, be confident, poor human heart, the divine "therefore" will come to you too one day, and then you will thank Him for the dark, horrifying "why."

I have to wait in the corridor because they are bringing prisoners from other cells. Then we are led to the assembly room on the lower floor. Our room, 79, was on the fourth floor, where Brauer's room is. We walk past his door. How I would like to call out a final "goodbye" to him through the peephole, but I can't, the Chekist is too close.

There are already many prisoners in the assembly room with their meager luggage, and more and more keep coming until the number increases to 83. There are also a few women among them. One is only wearing trousers, otherwise he is completely naked, doesn't even have a shirt, and

this is how he is to be exiled to the cold north.

We prisoners chip in so that he at least gets a Russian shirt, because the G.P.U. doesn't care about people, even if they don't have any clothes on. None of us knows where, because no one has been told yet. We get our money and our things, which were taken from us when we were admitted, through a small window. Then we are called up one by one.

"Fast, G. G." I step closer. The Chekist compares me with the photograph in front of him, which is attached to my accompanying papers. "What have you been sentenced to?"

"Five years in a concentration camp."

"That's right. Where to?"

"I don't know."

"To Archangelsk. Here, sign." I sign, and then it's the next person's turn, until all 83 men have gone through this process. Now everyone knows where they are being exiled to.

"Who is going to a concentration camp?" a young man asks, pacing the crowd. "I am," I answer, and he introduces himself. He is a komsomoletz, a young communist, an architect by profession. A year ago he was sent to France, when he came back he was accused of espionage, arrested, and now he is being sent to a concentration camp for three years. He is now selecting those who have to go to a concentration camp. There are nine out of 83, the others have been sentenced to free exile.

There are two types of exile: the so-called free exile and the concentration camp. The former

consists in taking the person to be exiled to some district in the north, where he must stay and is not allowed to leave the district. But he has nothing to live on, because he has been completely robbed beforehand, if he still had anything. So he has to rely on the G.P.U., which sends him into the primeval forest to cut wood. When the person in question has served his sentence, or more correctly, worked off his time, he is rarely released, but is usually exiled to another part of the north or to Siberia. Rarely is anyone allowed to go home, back to their homeland. Thus all so-called free exiles have to work unspeakably hard in order to get at least some food. They live with their families, if they are with them, in closed churches, old monasteries or self-built wooden barracks. The small children usually die in the first few days as a result of hunger, dirt, vermin and infectious diseases. Anyone who is able has to go to work, including all old women and men. They drag themselves laboriously from day to day under the heavy weight of the blood wood [Blutholze] until they literally collapse under it and die.

The second and most severe form of exile is the concentration camp, which we were soon to get to know well enough.

We are given lunch once again, the usual disgusting soup. Then we are examined again and put into another room, where we stand tightly packed together. I buy a postcard from one of my fellow sufferers and briefly tell my family where I am and that I have now been exiled to a concentration camp in Archangelsk for five years.

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But how do I hand over the postcard so that it gets through? All our correspondence is taken by the G.P.U. and simply not sent. I have to find another way, put the card in my pocket and wait for a good opportunity.

Finally, five of us are called out at a time and put into the "Black Raven". The 83 of us have to get into two of these cars, which are not at all big. Even though we are standing close together, we cannot all get in. The Chekists push us together with at our knees until we are all inside. When one car is full, we are still not ready to leave because the second one is not there yet. The air is so thick that we almost suffocate. "We are suffocating, open the door!" shout those at the back.

"Just keep calm, you'll be in exile soon enough, where you'll experience something completely different," the Chekist answers calmly.

The half-suffocating people scream louder and more desperately.

"What's going on?" asks a passing senior Chekist official. "It's taking too long for them, and they're running out of air."

"Then let half of them out until the second car arrives, so they don't suffocate."

He opens the door, lets half of them out, and the others get some air again. We have to sit down at a distance against the wall. One of them feels a little sorry for us poor prisoners, he doesn't want the poor guys to suffocate here without having done anything useful. No, first they should carry some wood,

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to help cover the costs that have been incurred with them so far, so his Chekist heart takes pity on them and saves them from suffocation.

Now the other "Black Raven" comes and is filled. Then we too have to get back into our "Raven" and are pushed and pressed again until we are all inside. Three "Black Ravens", the third with our luggage, set off for the northern station.

The journey is slow, but we finally reach our destination. Again, the door is not opened because for some reason we are not finished yet. During the journey the air was fine, but now when we are standing it is getting thicker and worse. I am standing at the very front of the gate where the air is not so bad, but from behind people are screaming louder and more anxiously for air, but in vain. A couple of men faint. Only now do they take pity on us, let us out and drag the unconscious ones out the door, where they revive.

We are lined up in rows of four, and then we go onto the platform under close guard with drawn swords. We walk past the audience on the platform at a rapid pace. I feel a great desire to throw myself into the audience and try to escape. A woman comes towards us and tries to catch someone from our ranks to hand over something. The guards rush at her like demons. "Knock her down!" shouts one. The woman jumps back in shock. Perhaps she wanted to give her husband a final greeting as he goes into exile, but she is not allowed to do so. She is only allowed to watch his final journey from afar.

No farewell, no hand contact from family members is allowed.

All 83 prisoners are put in a small detention car with bars on the windows and doors. In front of the car, the Chekists walk up and down the platform with their rifles at the ready to keep the crowd away. I look in vain for an opportunity to hand in my postcard, because the guards walking up and down are paying close attention.

Finally, the train starts moving. It is eleven o'clock in the evening. The guards jump up to accompany us. I quickly roll up my postcard like a cigarette and throw it among the spectators. A woman picks it up and unrolls it. It's a success, it will be thrown in the mailbox, I think. My wife did get this postcard.

We are lucky because our car is coupled to a passenger train. The ride goes faster and faster, and soon we are speeding along as if in flight.

I stand at the window and look out. Then come Losinoostrovsk, Los, Perlovka, Tanninka, Mytishche, Tarasovka, Klyazma and Pushkino, all places where a number of German family tragedies took place a few months ago.

There, not far from the railway line, lies a dark spruce and fir forest. It is Dzhamgarovka with its villas. There, in the darkness, lies the house in which we spent the last three months. I think of the time when we came to Moscow half a year ago. I think of how our boy tossed and turned restlessly with scarlet fever, his cheeks glowing, his lips bloody and cracked by the heat.

How my wife and I knelt at his bedside and begged God for his life, how we then took him to the hospital in Mytishche, where I don't leave his bed for weeks. How you, dear Lisa, visited us there every day and one morning, with pale lips and fear-filled eyes, ask: "Are you still there? Thank God! That night, someone was arrested in almost every German family. They asked about you too. I was afraid that they had taken you from the hospital." Then the next morning she comes again with the message: "They were here again last night to get you and wrote down your address." Every morning she brings more bad news, until one day she too stops coming. During the night she was arrested, taken to the train and sent back home in a cattle wagon with many others.

I am left alone with my terminally ill boy. They wanted to cleanse Moscow of the Germans, starting in Moscow and sending everyone back to their destroyed homeland in one night. Most of the men are already languishing in prison, and the women and their children were later banished. "I am the only one left," I think. But I am astonished when I find out that there are still many thousands of German families further away from Moscow. The suburbs of Moscow as far as Kljasma have been cleansed of the Germans, but many were still here. They were now given permission to go to Germany. A few days later I can still see the happy faces of these lucky people, but we have to stay here, we cannot go because we are torn apart and our boy is in the hospital suffering from scarlet fever.

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Then it becomes quiet outside Moscow. When about five thousand Germans have left for Germany, the rest are sent back to the interior of Russia, and only a few families remain in Moscow who are held back by illness.

Then Christmas comes and brings us a short telegram. It is addressed to the sick boy and reads briefly: "I am coming. Your mother!" Oh, how he jumps for joy because his mother is coming back. He is almost well and is due to be released from the hospital soon.

A few days later he is hanging on his mother's neck, crying. On the evening of the next day, we sneak slowly and quietly through the deep snow to our old apartment. We have been given permission by the militia to stay near Moscow until our boy is completely recovered, we still have to go to the hospital a few times a week for a checkup. We live there in complete seclusion and silence for another three months. Not one night do we lie down quietly. We see two long trains of exiles passing by us every day. Each train has forty to fifty exiles, women, children, old people, all mixed up. This goes on every day for two months.

Then comes the last evening when I am arrested too. "Papa, when are you coming back?" my son cries, crying and wringing his hands as I am kidnapped. "Be calm, my boy, I'll be back in two days."

In my mind I see my dear wife in the moonlight

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under those tall spruces, watching me as the Chekists lead me away.

Where are you now, my loved ones? Are you still waiting for me to return? How often will you, my dear wife, have stood there under those firs and spruces and waited for me. When will we see each other again? I must now go to the far north. I am being taken behind bars to Archangelsk, where I will be locked up in a concentration camp for five years. Five years. We will not see each other again, my loved ones. I will not make it through the five years. And you too, my beloved ones, will have long since starved to death and be dead in five years. Oh, God, why, why?

I can no longer control myself. I grip the bars on the window desparately and a hot stream of tears finally relieves my oppressed chest. I raise my wet eyes to the sky. Up there, the stars shine quietly and peacefully. Their trembling light reminds me of the One who sits enthroned above them, who holds the fate of mankind in His hands, who also sees me and my family and also directs our lives.

"You Almighty, who knows our ways, who sees us, including me here behind bars, You know what You are doing, You can also free me from the hands of my tormentors before the five years are up, if You want to. If not, then Your inscrutable but holy will be done!"

I stand at the window for a long time, but the tears stop, I am comforted, I become calmer and quieter.

Thus I must leave Moscow, which I entered for the first time with my family seven months ago.

Yes, back then, on the first night we spent at the station in Moscow, I had such dark forebodings, but I would never have believed that I would have to leave Moscow in such a way. I stand at the barred window for a long time and look out into the dark night and up at the shining stars. Then I get tired, sit down and doze off for a moment.

So the first night on the journey into exile passes. It is a heavy, dark night, but in the morning the sun rises again and brings more hope and life into the wounded souls of the exiles.

During the day I stand at the window almost all day and look out. Firstly, it is much cooler at the window because fresh air flows through the open window, and secondly, you can see the fresh green nature, the beautiful freedom. It is hot and sweltering in the carriage.

At lunch we get a salt fish. In addition, each man gets about 250 grams of bread a day. The bread was simply piled up on the ground by the toilet without any wrapping. I am not hungry and do not eat my salt fish because I know it will make me thirsty and we hardly get any water. Most people eat their fish, though. When the guards pass in a bucket of water now and then, there is a great commotion. Everyone crowds around, everyone wants at least a drink, and it cannot be done without cursing and pushing.

The further north we go, the deeper we penetrate into the primeval forest, the more exiles we see at all stations. Standing and sitting in long rows,

they are young and old, small and large, men, women, boys, girls, all with sad, pale faces, deeply sad eyes and the characteristic expression of an exile around their mouths. They are mostly farmers from the Ukraine. These poor fellow countrymen, who see themselves with desperate indifference exposed to Stalin's cruel destruction, make a terrible impression. These people have no willpower anymore, they indifferently endure everything, because they are condemned to death, to starvation, which is killing them by the thousands.

Dirt, vermin, the wet, rough, unusual climate, unbearably hard work, cause various diseases and wreak havoc on these poor exiles. This misery of others, the sight of these poor people, almost makes me forget my own fate.

At a station where our train stops, two girls of about sixteen look at us behind the barred window. I ask them something about the area. "We don't know, we're just like you," they answer with a deeply sad look that I will never forget. They are exiled Ukrainian girls.

A Russian Red officer who fought loyally under the Bolsheviks from the beginning is one of our fellow sufferers here in the car. When he fought against Wrangel in the Crimea, he had his quarters with a German colonist. A few years later, when he was on vacation in the Crimea on the Black Sea, he visited this German colonist and forgot a book there. The colonist

asks in a postcard where he should send the book. This colonist was also among the German refugees outside Moscow in 1929 and was arrested there. The following winter, the Red officer was also arrested and accused of counter-revolution. As proof, a copy of the postcard from the German colonist was shown to him. That is his crime. For that, he must be exiled for three years.

I stand with him at the window and look at the immeasurable natural treasures out there.

"We Russians do not know how to live," he finally says. "As it was in the times a thousand years ago, when we sent our messengers to the Normans with the request: "Our country is great and rich, but there is no order, come and rule over us," so it is today. First we had Tartar rule for over two hundred years, which enslaved and exploited us, then serfdom, which prevented us from rising, and now the Georgian Stalin and his accomplices are devastating our Mother Russia. The Europeans live much better on a fraction of the land that we own than we do in our great country with its enormous natural wealth. What don't we have? Land, coal, wood, petroleum, seas, large navigable rivers! We could live much better than the Europeans, but no, we allow ourselves to be devastated and torn apart by the crazy ideas of international communism. Our country is large and rich, but there is no order! That's how it was over a thousand years ago, and that's how it is today!"

I can still see him standing in front of me, this strong, flourishing man. He served the Bolsheviks for twelve years

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as a Red officer, now he too is exiled to Archangelsk. Outwardly he is a Red, but his heart is and remains national. Until now he has had to hold back, now that he has nothing left to lose, he vents to release his cramped, national Russian heart.

We stand at the window for a long time and look out, each of us pursuing our own thoughts. We hurry further and further north, through the magnificent primeval forests. At the stations there are vast masses of felled wood, which is felled by the exiles in winter at 30 - 40, sometimes even 50 degrees R. [Reaumur[1]] below zero and is now waiting to be exported. The exile camps are getting more frequent and larger, the sight of the ragged, starving, desperate exiles is getting more and more dismal, the area is becoming more and more inhospitable and desolate. Now and then there is still snow, we pass by large swamps, we are approaching our destination, Archangelsk.

"We don't know how to live!" it comes once again from the officer's chest, he spits, turns away from the window with a jerk and sits down listlessly on the hard, dirty bench of the prisoner's car.

The Concentration Camp

"A concentration camp!" someone shouts at the window. We rush to the window. Half a kilometer away is the concentration camp, about half a dozen wooden barracks surrounded by barbed wire. Guards stand on the corners, people walk back and forth in the yard. We can't see anything else.

[1] Reaumur is a temperature scale in which 0° Reaumur (melting point of ice) equals 32° Fahrenheit and 80° Reaumur (boiling point of water) equals 100° Fahrenheit. -30 Reaumur = -35.5 Fahrenheit; -50 R=-80.5 F

A long siren from the locomotive. We have reached our destination. It is a small, unattractive station near Archangelsk. Our detention wagon is uncoupled, pushed onto a siding, and the train continues. It is 6 a.m. A beautiful, peaceful morning. Roosters are crowing nearby. The small station is deserted and peaceful. Maybe it's not so bad, some people think. People are so easily influenced by external impressions.

Hour after hour passes and we are not allowed out. The sun is rising higher and higher, it is already afternoon and no one is paying any attention to us. Outside, the guard who accompanied us is yawning and bored. A few of them are slashing at the green branches with their swords out of boredom.

"When will they finally let us out?" asks an impatient man.

"Just wait, you'll get to know the concentration camp well enough!" is the mocking reply.

Finally, life comes into the place. Questionnaires are handed out to be completed by those who have been sentenced to free exile. Many cannot write or can only write very poorly. I fill out many forms for others, whereupon they add their names with stiff, clumsy fingers. Those who cannot write at all have to ask someone to sign for them. The questionnaires only contain short questions about name, date of birth, place of birth, etc. At the end is the order that the exiles are not to leave the place of exile

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and are to report to the G.P.U. within three days.

We are then all let out and have to line up in fours. We are counted again.

"Partija (group) march!" commands the first Chekist, and the group sets off, accompanied by a eagle-eyed guards. Everyone is carrying a bundle on their shoulder or under their arm. Some have heavy wooden boxes and are almost collapsing under the heavy load.

"Partija stoj!" (Group halt!) suddenly sounds another command. Everyone stands still and sighs with relief. We have marched a few kilometers in a forced march. I only have a small bundle under my arm and am not tired, but those with the heavy wooden boxes are completely exhausted.

Ten of us are called up. They are the slaughter sheep for the concentration camp. One of them protests that he has not been sentenced to a concentration camp, but to free exile. "Here in your papers it says 'concentration camp', and there's nothing to be done about it." No matter how much he claims that it's a mistake, perhaps a typo, it doesn't help him, he has to go. The others are taken to a large wooden shed nearby and left to their fate. We can already see the barbed wire of the concentration camp nearby. We're soon there and are handed over to the camp administration. Our guard has done his job and hurries away happily.

It's the reception time. Several hundred prisoners are standing and waiting for what is to come. They are from Yaroslavl on the Volga. A row of clerks is sitting behind a long table. In front of them is a

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small table around which the well-fed officials of the G.P.U. sit. One holds a list in his hand and reads out a name. The person in question steps forward.

"Do you have any money with you?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

He says a few rubles.

"Hand them over!"

When he has handed them over, he is examined to see if he has any more money or anything else with him. The money taken is recorded and the next person takes his turn.

We later received vouchers for the money taken. These only have value in the concentration camp. There is a small shop where you can buy small items with the vouchers: candy, writing paper, pencils, mirrors, stockings, bowls, etc., but no clothing or underwear was available.

I have a little over 60 rubles with me. I hand over some of it, the rest I hide between the shoe linings. It was not found.

I saw another pull a knife out of the ground after the inspection. He had buried it there before the inspection.

We are still strictly isolated from the others in the concentration camp. One of them walks past us. We ask him what they are doing in the camp and how they are doing. He stands still and willingly gives us information, but he has just started to do so when a Chekist approaches him and shouts at him.

"Which barracks are you from? What are you doing here?"

"I walked past, the new guys stopped me and asked

something about camp life, and I only explained to them..."

"March him to the prison cell!" the commander shouts to a guard.

He immediately steps aside and leads him away.

"Excuse me, Commander, they asked, and I only said..." "March him to the prison cell!" is the short, implacable order, and the poor man is locked in the cold, wet prison cell for twenty-four hours.

Finally, the admission procedure is over, and we are taken to the barracks, where, as in the Butyrki, we are given only rough, nailed-together boards to sleep on, without mattresses, pillows or blankets.

“Proverka!” (control) suddenly thunders through the barracks as we are about to fall asleep. Everyone quickly climbs down from the wooden plank beds and we line up in fours. Our Starosta practices the greeting formula one with us.

“Da sdrawstvuj tschetwjortaja rabotschaja rotta!” (Long live the fourth group of workers) he says.

“Sdra!” (a shortened Russian “Good day!”) we shout as one.

“Much too quiet! Louder!” —

“Sdra!”

“Still too quiet. Louder!”

“Sdra!” we shout with all our might.

“Still much too quiet. Much louder! So that the windows rattle! So that it can be heard in the clouds!”

We have to shout the hated “Sdra” again and again. Finally he seems satisfied.

“Partija smirno!” (Group quiet) he commands

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We stand to attention and do not move. The commander enters. It is as quiet as a mouse.

"Long live the fourth group of workers!" he says loudly.

"Sdra!" we answer like a man with a voice like thunder.

"You have your boys in bad shape! Be careful, when I come back they will answer louder!" he says to the Starosta.

"How many men do you have in your cell?"

"Four hundred and twenty! Two hundred are at work, six are sick, ten are in the detention cell and two hundred and four are standing here!" our foreman answers in a shouting voice.

We are counted and the commander leaves the cell.

"I told you, you should shout louder, you sons of bitches!" the Starosta curses after he has disappeared, and now he practices the greeting phrase with us for a long, long time.

"Sdra!... Sdra!... Sdra!... " echoes again and again, getting louder and louder through the barracks. Finally he is finished, and we climb tired and exhausted onto the plank beds, which are arranged in four double rows, one above the other, through the barracks. It is already after eleven, and it is still quite light. The sun has just set, but it is still so light that you can read comfortably outside without light and without moonlight. These are the bright northern nights. They weigh heavily on the nerves of those who are not used to them and do not let you sleep.

"Vstavaj!" "Get up! Get up!" echoes through the barracks at half past four in the morning. We have just

fallen asleep, and now we have to get up. We quickly line up to wash. Then we go for hot water for tea. Then we get a big spoonful of groats. We quickly eat the groats on our wooden plank beds and drink a cup of hot water with them, because only a few have any tea to pour in. The groats are carried through the rows in large wooden buckets and everyone gets their share in their bowl. Those who don't have one, get their share together with six other prisoners in a large tin bowl.

"Out! Out! Out!" the new command rings out. Everyone has to go out into the courtyard. They stream out of all the barracks, the poor exiles, and line up in rank and file. The whole large courtyard is teeming with people. There are several thousand of them. You can hear the commands everywhere, and it is as if they are preparing for war.

A kilometer to the side I see a large steamer. I can hardly believe my eyes, because I had no idea that we were so close to the water.

"What kind of ship is that?" I ask my neighbor.

"A foreign ship that has come to fetch wood."

"Are we here on the Northern Dvina?"

"Yes!"

If only I could escape on a ship like that, I think.

"Partiya march!" our overseer's command interrupts my thoughts, and our group sets off. Accompanied by armed Chekists,

we go to the workplace. Each group has about a hundred men, one or two armed guards and five or six junior supervisors.

We have to stack wood for pulp. It is brought in long trains from the interior of the primeval forest every day. The entire bank of the Northern Dvina is an immense wood storage area. The wood storage areas of our concentration camp cover several square kilometers. We work day and night, in two shifts: one shift from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and the other shift from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. There is a two-hour lunch break, from 11 to 1, but the long counting before and after meals robs us of the precious time, so that we only have an hour at most for lunch. We either have foul-smelling fish soup or similar meat broth. There is plenty of bread, 800 grams to a kilo a day for the full-time worker who works out his norm. But it is a kind of mixed bread that is not very digestible.

Clothes are soon covered in sap from working with the wood, and hands are torn. Clothes and shoes are not given. Some, who were almost naked, were given linen clothes and wool shoes. Most of the time it rains, often it snows, even in June. But we have to work outside in the rain and snow all the time. We sleep in the same wet clothes in our dirty barracks. When we finally get to our wooden plank beds after eleven o'clock in the evening, billions of insects rob us of the rest we so desperately need. We have no Sundays or rest days. Theoretically we are supposed to get every tenth day off, but we never got a day off.

If prison in Moscow had been terrible, it was much worse here. Working day and night in rain and snow, eating bad food, sleeping in wet clothes in the polluted, dirty barracks, packed together, with no days off, always driven on by dehumanized, bloodthirsty Chekists, our situation was such that no dog would have wanted to change places with us.

One time I came home from work and had a new neighbor. He had lice crawling around on the outside of his clothes. I pointed it out to him; he wiped it with his hand once and didn't bother the little creatures any further. At first I was outraged, but when I got to know him better, I felt deeply sorry for him. He had already spent a winter in a concentration camp, and his fingers and toes had frozen off while working in the primeval forest in temperatures of forty to fifty degrees below, and he had to go to work every night, despite his frozen limbs. He endured everything that came patiently and had no more strength to resist.

With our heads hanging like sheep to the slaughter, we went to work twice a day.

"We must perish here, there is no escape," said one to the other.

"Don't think that you have been sent here to serve your time! You have been sent here for physical destruction, because you are a harmful element. You will never return to your homeland. Even if you survive the three, five or ten years that you have been given, you will get more, but you will never return home. Do you counter-revolutionaries know,

what is meant for you? This!" and with that the Chekists pointed at the gun. "The bullet is meant for you, and it is only mercy if you are able to spend a few more years here!"

We had to convince ourselves of the truth of these words.

More and more foreign ships are coming to collect the blood wood: from England, Sweden, Norway, France, Denmark, America. I sometimes work in the lumber yard, sometimes on the ships. When the first ship arrived, they chose the strongest and healthiest men from among us, gave them new clothes and new shoes. "The foreigners can't see you in your rags," they said. But when more and more ships came, they let us out in our rags because there weren't enough clothes and shoes.

"Get up! Get up!" resounds through the ranks again one day early in the morning.
"Out, out, out!" comes soon afterwards.

We are standing outside in rank and file.

"Who wants to go to the next camp to work for a day?" the guard suddenly asks. Thirty of us volunteer, including me.

We were four men from Moscow who had stuck together from the beginning: an accountant, a tailor, the Jewish architect and I. All four of us were planning to escape from the first day. The accountant managed to get on the ship right from the start, where he slowly prepared his escape. The architect was given a job as a guard from the first day, then had a pass and could move freely in and out of the camp. He wanted to escape with me

and offered me a job as a supervisor on the ship so that I could prepare the escape well, but I declined.

The tailor disappeared one day. He was a Tolstoyan and a vegetarian. "The tailor was the first to leave!" said the three of us when we came home from work one evening and found his place empty. We continued working and envied the tailor.

The thirty of us are given a supervisor and go to the neighboring camp, which is only a small section of our large camp. It is about two kilometers from the large camp. There are only two barracks for the exiles, but the place is nevertheless very lively because there is a sawmill that is operated by free workers who also have their homes nearby. It is actually a small suburb of Archangelsk, has its own post office and makes a much better impression than the large camp. This camp has a large wooden shed, but only sawn wood is stacked in it, whereas the old camp only has logs.

"Hello! Good morning, Gerhard Gerhardovich!," a familiar voice suddenly calls out as we enter the yard. It is the missing little tailor. So he didn't leave, as we assumed, but was brought here in our absence.

"Good morning, Gerhard Gerhardovich!" calls a second person immediately afterwards. I look around in amazement. He is a farmer from Yaroslav, my neighbor in the big camp, who has been sentenced to twenty years as a kulak: ten years in a concentration camp, five years in free exile, and after that, five years of voting disenfranchisement.

Our little tailor and Grigoris, the old Russian, are visibly pleased to see me here.

"You know, Gerhard Gerhardovich, we work here on a German ship. We are much better off here than in the old camp. There is more order here, we eat at tables, we are given spoons, the work is easier. You must also be transferred here, you can also work on the German ship and escape with them, because they are your people!"

The good old man speaks as if from my soul. "They're Germans, your people!" I had been waiting for this for a long time. "Germans!" how good the sound was for my heart!

When we came into the harbor, I saw a ship with a German name and a German flag. I could have cried out loud with joy. The feelings that flowed through me at the sight of this German ship are indescribable. It was nothing more than the sight, but that was enough for now. Unfortunately, I could only catch a fleeting glance at the ship as I passed by. We had to work near an English ship.

"Now, boys, let's take a little break and smoke," the supervisor suddenly said in the afternoon, when we had already worked pretty hard. We have a new, young supervisor. He urges us on to work hard, but he also allows us a little break.

When the others are all sitting there, lost in their smoking and chatting, I slowly creep away, walk along the bank, past the English ship and then come to the German ship. The whole shore is full of people,

so that my presence is not noticed. In addition, there is a drinking water station on the bank opposite the German ship, where the exiles are allowed to drink water. If my absence had been noticed, I would have pretended drink water.

I arrive at the German ship. A ship official with a white cap accepts wood. I stand inconspicuously near him and speak to him in German: "Excuse me, I am a German teacher, sentenced to five years of forced labor in a concentration camp. Would it not be possible to escape abroad on your ship?"

The man looks at me in surprise.

"Why were you exiled?"

"Because I wanted to emigrate from Russia."

"Only for the intention of emigrating?"

"Yes, only for that reason, because I have not committed any crime and am completely innocent. Almost all of us exiles here are innocent."

"Don't you have a wife and child?"

"Yes, I have a wife and a child."

"What are you going to do with them if you flee abroad now?"

"I don't know where my family is now, because I haven't heard from them since my arrest. If I escape abroad, I hope to see them again, perhaps in a year or two, but if I have to stay here, I'll probably never see them again, because I'll die here, like all the others."

"I'll let you escape on our ship if you can manage it. But I can't actually help you with that,

you have to do it yourself. But how are you going to start? You won't get through. The control station will search the whole ship and you will definitely be found there."

"Really? That's news to me. Are all ships searched?"

"Yes, and the controls are very strict, you can't possibly get through. Also, we are being watched."

With a brief farewell I leave. The nearby workers watched the conversation in German with curiosity. We behaved as inconspicuously as possible. The official measured his wood and only stood up now and again. I didn't stand still either, I walked back and forth and acted as if I had something to do. On the bank, opposite us, there is a small wooden hut in which the G.P.U. supervises all the work. Recently, several well-fed Chekists arrived from Archangelsk by boat and are probably staying in this hut. You can imagine that the whole conversation with the German official in this situation makes me extremely anxious, because if my conversation is noticed, I will either be punished with detention or, even worse, transferred.

Halfway back, the supervisor comes hurrying towards me.

"Where were you, Fast?" he calls out excitedly.

"Where, else would I be? I went to the drinking-water station there on the shore."

"Wow, I got a fright!" he says. "I suddenly look around and you're missing. I ask the others, nobody knows. "He's probably gone!" I think.

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You can't imagine how frightened I am. If you leave again, you have to let me know! Who knows what you're thinking? In the end, you have a boat waiting for you. You get in it, you're gone, and I'll pay for you."

You're not so stupid! I think to myself, but I calm him down, go with him and carry on working quietly as if nothing had happened. But I'm always thinking about the escape plan.

I've already studied the ships well, but the control station is completely new to me. I always thought that once I was hidden on the ship, I would be safe from the persecutors, but now it's completely different.

We work until late in the evening until we've finished our task. When we go home, it's raining.

"Gerhard Gerhardovich, good evening!" someone shouts from the top of the ship as we walk past.

I look up in surprise. It's the tailor who working up there. Oh, if only I could keep you company up there, I think, but I have to march on with my comrades.

Dead tired, I throw myself down on my hard bed when we finally get back to the old camp. But sleep is still a long way off, because the escape is haunting me.

The next day I have to work in the old camp again. It is a beautiful June day. It rained during the night, but now it is beautiful. I have to take wood to the ship and I keep a close eye on everything that is going on onboard it.

There are several ships at anchor. All of them have come to fetch wood.

"How will you get on the ships?" I ask myself. Only those who work on the ships are allowed to board them. I have already asked the supervisor a couple of times to let me work on a ship, but he still won't agree. The work on the ship is much easier, and no one who has been assigned a job like that wants to be pushed out of it.

The next morning, when we are all lined up again to go to work, our names are suddenly read out. Those who are called have to step forward. My name is also called out. When we are all lined up, we are told: "Go, get your things and come with us. You will be transferred to the other camp." My heart rejoices. Now I am near the German ship.

"You don't have to go if you don't want to," the Jew says to me.

He wants to escape with me. But I think to myself, if it's possible, I'll escape alone, because that's certainly easier and less conspicuous.

We quickly get our backpacks and happily leave with our guards. The exile is happy about every change and hopes that it will bring improvement. It can't be worse in the new camp than in the old one. We've already heard that much from our fellow sufferers.

When we arrive at the new camp, we are registered and have to go to work. "You're free in the afternoon because from now on you have to work at night."

It rains in the afternoon. My comrades go to sleep.

Suddenly I see a small Russian Testament in the hand of my neighbor, a Russian priest. I can hardly believe my eyes.

"Whose Testament is that?"

"Mine," answers the priest. He came from Belarus, from the Polish border, not through Moscow, and he managed to take the Testament with him.

He hands it to me and goes to work. Moved with joy at finally being able to read the word of God after a long period of hunger, I hold it in my hands. I can now understand the words of the prophet: "They will run from one end of the earth to the other, seeking the word of God, and will not find it." The words of Jesus: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," are now even more understandable to me than before. If the soul does not have God's word, it must starve. His word is not bound to the letter, the whole of nature, his spirit, conveys it to us, but we find it nowhere as clear as in the Holy Scripture. The joy of the little Russian Testament brings a few tears to my eyes. I feel particularly abandoned now. The German ship I wanted to flee on left the harbor this morning.

I open the Gospel of John and read chapters 14 to 17. What words of love and comfort our Master spoke there! I sit on my hard bed and read and read. I forget my rest, forget my comrades around me, and my hungry, thirsty soul slurps in full

from the source of life. Here it can find refreshment and rest, a rest that the world does not know and cannot give.

"In the world you have fear, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!"

Did he, our Savior, not see us, when he spoke those words before his death? "I do not pray for the world, but for those you have given me." Were those words really there? He, who now went to death for me and my sins, did he not think of his sufferings on Golgotha, but of me and you, of us poor sinners, for whom he would soon, soon hang on the cross?

No, how small, how insignificant are our sufferings compared to His sufferings. We have earned eternal death, we nailed Him to the cross, Him who asks the Father for us with such burning love. No, I will no longer hesitate, but surrender to His will. If He wants to save me from this place of curse, He can do it, even if the German ship is now gone. If not, then His holy will be done anyway.

"What are you reading?" someone suddenly asks.

I look up and see an old Russian farmer in front of me. I invite him to sit down. He shyly accepts this invitation and sits down next to me.

"I read God's Word."

"What kind of person are you? Are you a Baptist or an evangelical Christian?"

"No, I am a Christian."

"There were people like that in our area too, they always read the Bible. They were such good people. The G.P.U. arrested most of them, shot many

and the others were sent into exile. Please read me something from the Testament."

"Please read it," I say and hand it to him.

"Oh, I can neither read nor write!" is the sad answer. And this poor, shy, uneducated peasant, who could neither read nor write, had also been banished by the G.P.U. for many years as a counter-revolutionary.

I read to him from Jesus' high priestly prayer, to which I have just opened. The old peasant sits next to me on the wooden plank bed, nodding to himself and murmuring: "Oh, how beautiful!" His soul also hungered for the word of God.

The call to work comes soon after. We have not slept, we have to work all night long, but our soul is refreshed, for it has drunk from the fountain of life, and that is more strengthening than sleep.

"The architect is looking for you," I am told.

I quickly rush out and find him with the carpenters. "Fast will be working with you tonight. Now I'm taking him to the old camp to get nails for you," he says to the carpenters.

On the way to the old camp, we discuss our escape route. "We absolutely have to flee on a ship, because we'll die here. But it's very dangerous! If we're caught doing this, we'll be shot. I think the accountant has already brought his pillow onto the ship," says the architect. The accountant works on the big steamer that I saw on the first morning. During this conversation we go to the old camp. The guard already knows the architect and lets us pass.

Once we have nails, we go back to the camp. On the way we mostly talk about the escape. "If a German steamer comes, you arrange the escape with it, but only with the captain, because we cannot trust anyone else. I will come to you every day at the sawmill to see how far you have come. But I repeat once again, caution, great caution is necessary, because I have heard from others today that we will be shot without further ado if we are betrayed!" says the Jewish architect.

He has already made contact with the highest camp administration and knows all about it. The entire camp administration, all the guards, are exiles. In our camp there is only one free man, a Chekist, who is in charge. Among the exiles there are also communists and Chekists who have fallen from grace. They are used as guards in the camps and now have to work their way back up here. The stricter and worse they are to their subordinates, the more they torture and exploit them, the sooner they will regain grace and freedom.

When we arrive at the new camp, we hand over the nails and then go to a dining room next to our camp. Our camp is also strictly guarded, but my architect has a pass and we can go anywhere. The dining room is only for free factory workers, and the exiles have no right to eat here. Of course, we don't have to show our passports either, but we are dressed somewhat smartly and we are not asked for our passports. As we stand at the cash register, a free exile asks me if I would like to take two portions so that

so that he could also get something to eat. It hurt me to refuse his request, but I was afraid that if I asked for two portions, I would end up having to show my papers, and I didn't have any.

Poor man, you probably don't realize that we are both in much deeper trouble than you, I think, because he is only a free exile and we are from the concentration camp. Only our bold, daring behavior and our still somewhat decent clothing get us food. There is good porridge and soup with it. We leave some for our hungry fellow sufferer and leave the hall. It was the last time I ate freely on Russian soil, even as an exile.

Outside, the architect says goodbye to me. He promises to call in once a day to find out whether a German ship has arrived yet, but I have not seen or heard from him since.

I am now on the night shift and go on board the ship a couple of times, where I have the opportunity to get to know the ship from the inside.

Then one night passes like the other. When the rain pours down, we always try to hide from the overseer. Now he rounds up a bunch of huddled workers here, now there. But we had to work so much longer in the morning because we had to get our task done.

My escape

It is night again and we are at work. I go on an English steamer and I really want to hide there. "No, not yet," I say.

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I leave the steamer and go to work in the lumber yard. Soon afterwards the Englishman weighs anchor and leaves Russia. I watch it with longing eyes.

After midnight a new steamer arrives. It is already loaded to the top with lumber. It will certainly not stay here much longer, if it were a German one, I would try to escape with it! I think to myself.

It is Whitsun [Pentecost] evening. "Out, out, out!" the usual command rings out again in our barracks after 5 p.m. We slowly get up from our resting areas, slowly sidle out, slowly line up. The guard comes, counts us, and our group sets off. As we pass the ships, I see that the steamer from yesterday is a German one. Thank God! You can escape with this steamer if God opens the way for you! I think.

I work high up on a pile of wood until midnight. I have never worked in the concentration camp with such joy as I did that night, because it is supposed to be my last night here. The full moon appears on the horizon, colors the sky blood red and disappears again the next moment, because it only appears for a few moments in the summer. When my comrades go to the nearby smokehouse, I lie on my knees up there on the pile of wood and beg God for help.

Finally, the call comes for dinner. Everyone rushes to the barracks where we get our evening meal. "Today he got an answer," says one of my table companions.

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Who?" I ask.

"Well, the one who was sentenced to ten years in a concentration camp and who made a request that they should shoot him."

"Well, and what is the answer?"

"His wish will be granted."

Poor man, that's where you end up in such hours when you have no hold on God. From his point of view, the man is undoubtedly right, because a quick death by bullet is definitely preferable to years of painful death. He knows that he will not survive ten years in a concentration camp, and so he asks for a strange mercy, to be shot. "Your wish will be granted." What an answer! The mass murderers probably wanted to make an example of him, to warn others. What is a human life to them when they are mercilessly destroying millions? "Your wish will be granted!" One shot, one bang, and it's all over. Yes, that is how the natural man thinks, who knows nothing of a ruler of our ways, who is stronger than all the power of demons. One shot, and everything is over! Poor fool, how great will your disappointment be!

The meal is over. I sit and ponder my escape. Grigory, the old faithful Russian, is lying on his bed next to me. He is called to work. I quickly tell him my plan, give him my camp receipts, my pillow, my blanket, and little things that I still have. "When I come back, give it back to me, otherwise you can keep it," I say to him. "I will take the money,

but I'll write to my wife and tell her to send money to your wife in return," he replies.

A handshake, a kiss in the Russian tradition, and he hurries off to work. I throw myself on my bed. The bright night outside has turned the barracks only into semi-darkness. The decisive hour is coming soon. The escape will bring me my freedom, but it could also cost me my life if I am caught.

My whole life flashes before my eyes again. I see myself as a child with my brother in Lugovsk riding on our rocking horse. I see myself in the village school, in the boys' middle school, as a settler in Siberia with my parents in our second beloved home. I see my parents and brothers in Schoental. I see myself as a teacher, as a groom with my bride, I see how God blesses us, but how everything is taken away in one summer.

I think of that last night in Schoental that I and my youngest brother Heinrich spend there: It is midnight. Slowly and quietly an old mother walks across the street to her youngest son. She opens the house quietly, because in Siberia we almost always leave the doors unlocked. Then she enters the house of her youngest son. The full moon looks quietly through the window into the farmhouse room. Tomorrow they want to leave, her eldest and her youngest. Her heart almost breaks, because she will never see her sons again, because they want to go to America, and she is old, probably doesn't have long to live, and it is the last night that she will have her children with her.

Now she stands here at midnight in the moonlight at the bedside of her youngest son, lonely and alone. Who understands

her pain, who knows what she feels. She is alone because she cannot, she is not allowed to tell anyone what she feels. Finally she can't take it anymore. A few heavy tears roll quietly down her furrowed cheeks, they become more and more, she finally forgets everything else and sobs away quietly.

"Heinrich, Heinrich, isn't someone crying?" the young woman wakes her husband. He gets up and sees his sobbing mother standing in front of him. When she sees herself discovered, she disappears as quietly as she came. Up in the sky the departing cranes are screaming, a kitten scurries quietly around the corner, it is so beautiful and quiet outside, and oh, my heart hurts so much!

And then the next day, my mother's last handshake. She is silent, only a few big tears roll down again, she waves her hand defensively, a final greeting, and I don't see her anymore.

Then the farewell to my wife's parents and siblings, the farewell to my beloved old father at the train station, and finally to my family, wife and son, when the G.P.U. snatches me away from them.

Oh, my loved ones, will I see you again in my life? Where are you now, how are you? I don't know, because I haven't heard from you since. If the escape succeeds, then perhaps we will see each other again, if not, then..., oh then…I turn my burning face into the pillows and a hot stream of tears wets it.

"Out, out, out!" shout the guards in the semi-dark barracks and drive us out. I get up and walk out with firm steps. The escape is about to begin. All unrest has left my soul,

I am determined to take the dangerous step.

"Get into ranks!" I stand in the front rows, where those who are to go on the ship are standing. Those who, like me, are to work in the lumber yard have to stand at the back. But not everyone is allowed to work where they want, but where they are assigned, and I work in the lumber yard at night, so I have no right to go on the ship.

"One, two, three, four!" We are counted off. When everything is ready and the guards are ready with their rifles, the command rings out: "Shagom (at a walking pace) march!" The group sets off.

We approach the harbor. My group splits up and goes to the lumber yard. I turn around doubtfully. Should I follow them? Oh, no, now you dare! I think, and walk forwards, strongly and determined. When I get to the ship, I'm the first to quickly climb the ladder. The others follow slowly, because they still have time to get to work. The supervisors bring up the rear.

At the top I pass a few smoking boatmen. You lucky people! I think, and hurry on to the other side of the ship. I rip open the first door I come across. Then I see the door opposite being opened too. I quickly slam it shut, hurry on and open the second door. There is a staircase leading down.

I quickly climb down and come into the boiler room. On one side a smoking kerosene lamp burns and dimly lights the room. The other side is dark. I throw myself into a dark corner, thank God,

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that he has led me this far, and ask for further guidance.

Soon afterwards, someone slowly descends the stairs. He is a young man of about 35, of medium height and with broad shoulders. He holds a pipe between his lips from which he takes a deep puff now and again. He hums a song softly, goes to the fire, pokes around in it with a long iron fork, throws coals on, and leaves the room again. I lie very still in the corner and watch him.

When he is gone, I beg God to send the man again, if it is His will that I reveal myself to him, because that is a dangerous thing. If he betrays me, I am lost.

After a short while, someone comes down the stairs again. I lie quietly in my dark corner and watch him. It is the same man from before. He goes to the fire again and throws coals on. Then he prepares to leave the room. Now it's time! - I think, get up and call him.

The stranger approaches slowly and carefully.

"I am a German teacher, banished to a concentration camp for five years. Is it possible for me to escape abroad with you?" I say as he comes closer. He pulls out a pocket lantern, shines the light on me from head to toe, into every corner and leaves. I stand in my corner and wait to see what happens next. It isn't long before he comes back. "Come with me!" he says quietly to me. I follow. He leads me through the engine room into the screw tunnel. There he asks me about everything again.

"Sit here and wait. I'll be back soon, no one will find you here."

He leaves the room. I sit on a sack and wait.

After a quarter of an hour he comes back.

"No, it's not possible. I spoke to the first engineer and he says it's not possible. The ship is being searched by the G.P.U. at the control station. If they find you, you will be shot, and I, who hid you, will also be shot, and the ship will never be allowed to come to Russia again," is the short message.

But it can't be that everything is lost now! - I think and plead like a little child, because it's life or death for me now.

"Find a hiding place here, I won't betray you," says the stoker finally and leaves the room.

I sit down and wait for him for a long time, because he has already come twice, maybe he will come a third time and show me a hiding place, I think. But he doesn't come again.

I finally get up quietly and grope my way along the spiral corridor, all the way to the end of the ship. There the room has a small extension. If I go to the side, I can't be seen, even if the corridor is lit. You have to come along the corridor toward me if you want to find me. It is a cold, wet room.

Glad that I have escaped the pursuers so far, I stop. I can't sit here. Up on the ship I hear the screaming and cursing of my comrades. How glad I am that I am completely safe down here.

I am alone and will soon no longer have to hear the horrible cursing.

Hour after hour passes. I can tell the time by the siren of the sawmill which sounds every four hours. It is cold and I am freezing. Then I do gymnastics and try to warm myself up. I have nothing to eat except three small pieces of sugar, which the Russian only pressed into my hand as I left.

After 24 hours I finally fall asleep from exhaustion, hanging on the damp ship's wall, half sitting, half standing. I have wrapped myself up in my grey coat, my cap pulled down over my face. Thus I sit, or rather hang, crouched like a light-shy owl in my lonely hiding place.... Suddenly someone shines a light in my face. I open my eyes in shock. It is the stoker I spoke to the day before. He is standing at the entrance to my hiding place. When he sees me, he turns around and says to someone standing behind him, whom I cannot see: "You can go!" The man turns around quietly and walks away.

"There you are!" says the stoker. "I've been looking for you everywhere. If I'd known where you were, I would have brought you something to eat. I'll bring you hot coffee in a minute."

He disappears, returns soon after with a large copper pot, pours hot coffee into the large lid, and I sip the aromatic liquid with pleasure. How I feel new strength and new courage flowing through my veins!

Soon after, the stoker returns and unwraps two thick slices of white bread from the paper.

"Are you going to eat it all?"

"Of course, I'll eat it all!" I answer with shining eyes, because we were always hungry in the concentration camp, and I haven't eaten anything for 24 hours now.

"Be careful, don't leave anything over, not a crumb, so that no one will notice if you're found!"

"Be completely calm, I'll eat everything and leave nothing over."

"From now on I'll bring you food three times a day, but make sure you don't betray me if you're found!"

"Don't worry, if I'm found I'll be shot, I know that. But what would it help me if I betrayed you then? I won't betray you under any circumstances."

"Yes, but who knows what you'll do in your fear of death. You might not even know what you're saying!"

"Don't worry, I won't betray you if I'm found."

He leaves and I eat my bread. It tastes excellent! Never in my life has anything tasted so good. Now I'm provided for. The stoker wants to bring me food three times a day. What more could I want? Up above I hear the workers shouting, and on the nearby bank the siren of the sawmill sounds.

From then on, the stoker brings me food three times a day. I stand in the wet, cold room for another 24 hours. Then the ship is supposed to sail 18 kilometers further and load more wood. From time to time the stoker comes to see if I'm still there. "Has no one been here?"

"No."

"The militiamen are running up and down like crazy outside. If they come and find you, make sure you don't betray me!" I try to console him every time by assuring him that I will not betray him.

But another thought is worrying me now. How am I supposed to hold out in this wet, cold room any longer? I can't sit or lie down. I've become so tired and sleepy in the last 48 hours that I can hardly stand upright. I'm also freezing terribly. All my exercise and energy are no longer of any use.

"Please show me a warmer hiding place, because I can't stand it here any longer, I'm going to die here!" I say to the stoker when he comes over again, anxiously, to see if I'm still there.

"Yes, you should have looked for one, I didn't show you one at all."

"Yes, dear man, but I don't know the ship and you do."

"Yes, you should have found a better hiding place," and with that he leaves.

Soon he returns.

"Come with me, but be careful! The Russians have all left the ship and the crew is eating dinner."

He goes ahead with his flashlight and I follow slowly. In the boiler room he shows me a winding entrance to a better hiding place.

"Climb through here and you will find a narrow gap between two walls on the right. Here you have an old blanket, put it on a board that you will find there, then you can lie on it and sleep. No one will find you there."

I climb through the entrance over heating forks, spades, old buckets and various junk and find the hiding place as the stoker described it. It is a narrow gap between the freshwater tank and the wall. I wedge the board between the walls, spread the blanket on it and lie down to sleep. The board is much too short. I find a bucket in the junk and put it under my feet. I am soon fast asleep.

Suddenly I wake up from a terrible heat. When I pull myself together, I notice oppressive, muggy air that almost takes my breath away. We had traveled 18 kilometers further. The fires were all well stoked. When we arrived at the new harbor, the stoker closed all the air pipes so that the heat did not escape and went to sleep. Hence the great heat and bad air. I cannot stay here; I will suffocate! I quickly rush into the boiler room and from there go back to the screw tunnel where it is cool. I can't get the door to the engine room open. It's much hotter in the boiler room. I'm drenched in sweat in no time. I'm already climbing the stairs to rush up to the deck. But no, the Russian guards will discover you and you're done for. You have to go back to your hiding place.

I hurry back, sit down on my board, lay my head against the cold wall of the water tank and summon all my willpower not to fall asleep. But again and again I catch myself losing consciousness and falling asleep. Then I wake up suddenly, trying with all my strength to think pleasant thoughts,

imagining how beautiful it will be it will be when I am completely free and see my family again, I press my hot forehead more firmly against the cool wall, and the next moment I am half unconscious again. I don't know how long it went on like this, but suddenly the air is better and the stuffiness has disappeared. Morning has come and the stoker has opened the air ducts. I tell him later that I almost suffocated, and since then he no longer closes the air ducts at night.

We are in the new harbor for another four days. Every time the ship's crew is eating, the stoker comes into the room and calls quietly into my hiding place: "Sluschaj!" (Listen). Then I quietly stick my head out, he hands me my food, and I disappear into my hiding place with it. "Sluschaj!" he calls again afterwards and takes the empty dishes. Every meal he brings me the same thing that they get. I lie there for four days and four nights in my warm but cramped hiding place.

On the evening of the fourth day, the stoker comes to my hiding place with a flashlight.

"As soon as the captain is here, we'll set off. Then, after an hour's journey, we'll reach the control station, where the G.P.U. will search the entire ship. That's the most dangerous place. Once we're through there, all danger will be over if they don't find you. But to get through there undetected is a real challenge."

He collects all the pieces of paper, matches, etc. so that nothing can reveal the whereabouts of a person. "Come with me!" he says and goes further into the hiding place. We turn right again, then he shows me the entrance under the floor. The boiler room has

a double floor. The first allows the water to seep through, which the stokers use to pour on the hot ash. It stays on the second floor and is pumped into the sea.

The stoker shines a light down. There is a small gap between the bottoms. You can see everything covered in water and ash.

"When we leave, you wait an hour and then crawl down here, as far as you can. You stay there until I give you a signal. But crawl far enough! It's awful there, but it's better to hold out for an hour than to lose your life. I'm not on watch now and I'm going to sleep. "Goodbye!"

He turns around briefly and leaves. Soon the ship starts moving. I wait about another hour, then I hear the siren of another ship, and our ship answers.

"Now we're coming to the control station!" I think, take off my coat, roll it up, push it down and then crawl down myself, legs first. I can just about slide further on my stomach. I do as the stoker said and crawl down as far as I can. There I lie in water and ashes. Above me the stokers shovel coals and pour water on them, and the caustic solution then flows down on me. Every time a bucket of sea water is poured over me, I have to summon all my willpower not to make a sound.

I must have lain down there for about an hour. The stoker still doesn't call. But I can't stand it any longer and try to go back to my unearthly

hiding place. Oh dear, I can't find the exit! The ship is big, I've crawled so far, and it's pitch black down there. "I wonder if the stokers, who don't know anything about me, have filled up my hole in the meantime? Then I must perish miserably here." A wild fear overwhelms me. I think of screaming. But no, no, the Chekists will still be on the ship, and then I would be betrayed.

I grit my teeth and, sliding on my stomach in the water and mud, look for the exit. All in vain. What should I do? I lie still for a few moments and cry out to God inwardly. When I then look around again, it seems to me that one spot is a little brighter. I slowly slide over to it, and, thank God! it is the exit. I carefully crawl back into my above-ground hiding place. My clothes are dripping with water and ash. I take them off, hang them on the warm heating wall for a while and then put them back on. Then I sit down at the entrance, ready to slide down at any moment, because I don't know yet whether we have already passed through the checkpoint because the stoker hasn't called yet.

"Now we're coming to the checkpoint!" the stoker suddenly shouts. So we haven't even been there yet and instead of one hour it takes two hours to get there and I've crawled down unnecessarily. I'm not going to crawl down there again, I decide. If the Chekists want to find my hiding place here, they'll first have to crawl over various pieces of equipment and junk to get here, because the stoker has barricaded the entrance to my hiding place with them.

I sit down at the entrance to the underground hiding place and wait for things to unfold. A strange ship whistles, ours answers and stops immediately.

Everything goes quiet because the captain and the whole crew have to gather up there on deck where their passports are checked. Suddenly I hear a few men coming down the stairs into the boiler room. They are speaking to each other in Russian. They are the Chekists. They are walking up and down in the boiler room, searching. Then it goes quiet again. After half an hour I hear the stokers shoveling again and it seems to me that the ship is moving again. "Thank God, you're safe now!" I think, but I stay sitting at the entrance to the hole, because the stoker hasn't given me a signal yet, and so I still don't know for sure whether the danger is over.

Suddenly, light falls into my twisted entrance. What is that? Now the guys are coming after all! I think and crawl back down as quickly as possible. But I don't get very far, because the light is coming noticeably closer. Now someone is shining a lantern down on me... I'm still lying on the right in the dark. If only he doesn't shine a light on the right side, because then he'll see me I think, and at the same moment he waves his lantern to the right and shines it straight in my face. My whole body is shaking and I'm just waiting for the words: "Anuka, Tovarich, vylesaj!" (Now, comrade, come out) ... It is my end ... Everything is becoming black before my eyes ...

The man with the lantern bends down, looks down at me and, it's the stoker!

"Come out, the devils are gone. But have they been searching! They counted us up there five times, and then they scattered again and again, searching, but thank God! they did not find you. Now all danger is over and you are safe!"

With a sigh of relief, I crawl out. The cold sweat of fear is on my forehead. I can't say anything for a long time; the stoker's light has frightened me so. I kept thinking that he would call out, but he wanted to see whether I was hiding well and wanted to use the lantern to help me crawl out.

"Come into the boiler room, because now the danger is over and you can stay with us in the boiler room. The only thing you have to do is sleep in your hiding place until the coal bunker is empty, then you can sleep there. You must not show yourself to the captain or the first mate, because the latter is an enemy of the captain and will report it to him as soon as he sees you. He looks everywhere for an opportunity and a reason to get one over on the captain because he wants to be captain himself. And if the captain finds out that you are here, he will have to hand you over to the police in England, and they will send you without much ado back to Russia."

In the boiler room, the stoker introduces me to his assistant Hermann. He is a young, friendly fellow of 24 who is also very happy about my rescue. "Go and get something to eat!" orders Fritz, my protector. "Right away!" is the answer and soon thereafter he returns with the food. My nerves also calm down a little after the meal.

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Since then, I always work for the stoker when he is on watch. I don't understand his work, but I help him shovel coal and ash. However, I still disappear into my foxhole to sleep. I also gradually get to know all the stokers and the machinists.

We sail along the Murmansk coast and then through the Norwegian archipelago. Only now and then am I allowed to take a look out into the picturesque landscape. It is as if we are sailing in a wide river, framed on both sides by high mountains. The peaks of the mountains are still white, and down on the beach are the beautiful, colorful Norwegian fishermen's houses. I can never get enough of the lovely landscape, but I am only allowed to look out for a few moments each time so that the captain or his strict assistant don't see me.

Our journey from Archangelsk to England takes eleven days. I live like this on the ship in the boiler room for almost three weeks. I don't lack for food and drink. At night, when Fritz's watch is over, I usually wash myself with warm water, chat for an hour or two with the stokers and machinists, and then go to the coal bunker to rest. There I have laid two broad iron planks on a block, and I can finally stretch my limbs again. My bedroom is not the most comfortable, my bed with the thin blanket on the hard iron planks is not the softest, but it is no longer a concentration camp, and I am overjoyed. I am no longer rushed to work day and night in rain, snow, and dirt, I no longer need

to sleep in overcrowded, dirty barracks in stuffy air and among lice and bedbugs. The Chekists with their guns are gone and I am free, free, free!

We are getting closer and closer to England. There are dark nights again, which have such a soothing effect on the nerves compared to the bright nights in the far north.

Finally, only one night separates us from our goal. I wash my laundry again and put it in the stoker's cabin for storage. We are already sailing along the coast of England. After midnight, the stoker goes on deck with me and shows me the coast of England, which waves so kindly to us with its lights and lighthouses. Slowly and quietly our steamer cuts through the waves. Above us the clear sky with its thousands of stars, to the right the lights of England and below us the deep, gently surging, dark sea. Lost in a dream, I stand on board and look into the dark night. What will you bring me, you new world? Behind me the gloomy prisons of Moscow, the gruesome concentration camp of Archangelsk with all the terror and horror of the millions condemned to death. In front of me the coast of England and freedom. Freedom? Am I free yet? I have not a scrap of paper, no ID with me, and how will I fare, the deprived, the displaced, the person without rights in England? Like a vagabond, without clothes, without money, without paper, in dirty rags I arrive in England. What will the English do to me?   Free! Free! Free! my heart rejoices, and I throw all my dark thoughts into the dark, deep sea.

"We will banish you; we will banish your wife and child too!" I hear the cold, ironic laughter of the Chekist. Oh God, no, no, that can't happen! What use would my freedom be to me if they, my poor loved ones, were now somewhere in the far north, groaning and moaning under the yoke of the Chekists and the burden of the blood wood. That one terrible thought of this possibility constricts my throat.

"Come down!" the stoker warns, tearing me out of my reverie.

Morning breaks. We arrive in the harbor. Fritz gives me instructions on how to behave with the English police and then leaves me alone. In the stokers' washroom I take a bath, put on my clean clothes, throw my last, lice-infested shirt overboard and thus clear away the rest of the camp lice.

I spent almost three weeks down in the boiler room in coal dust and dirt, but the good stokers were like brothers to me. Now they have all gone ashore and I am alone in the cabin. They looked after me like a brother. Fritz, my protector, in particular, did a lot, a great deal for me and looked after me, like the Good Samaritan looked after the man who had fallen victim to murderers. May God reward him, the good, brave fellow!

I am in England and my wife and child have stayed in Russia. They probably have no idea how I am or where I am. I have not received any news from them either and do not even know where they are. But I trust in the Heavenly Father and confidently believe that he will look after them.

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In England

Tuesday, July 1, 193_, eight o'clock in the evening.

I'm in prison in Hull. Yesterday evening, when "we" stokers were all sitting together discussing the battle plan for today, the first engineer suddenly came in and said to me:

"Gerhard, you've been betrayed, come to the captain, because he's got wind of it."

We've just eaten dinner. I'm standing at the table washing up. Then I take the water and pour it overboard. Then a man calls from the front:

"Come to me for a bit, but quickly!" It's the captain.

"Right away," I answer, hurry back to the cabin, put on my Russian shirt and shoes and hurry to the captain.

He's grumpy and nervous.

"When and where did you come on board?" he asks harshly.

In brief, I tell him about my arrest, exile and escape. His face becomes friendlier and friendlier, and finally he asks:

"Where were you when the G.P.U. searched the ship?"

"I was hiding in the coal bunker."

"Do you also know what would have happened to you if you had recovered?

"They would have shot me without further ado."

"Yes, they would have. What is your name?"

"Gerhard Fast."

"Your name is German. Did they give you anything to eat?"

"Yes, I always got fed."

He is visibly satisfied and doesn't ask any more questions.

"What do you want to do now?"

"I want to go to Germany first and then to Canada."

"Do you have any money?"

"Twenty-three Russian rubles."

"That's nothing, nobody here will give you anything for that. It's just a piece of advice, we have to go to Hull tomorrow and see what we can do."

I'm fine with it, because now at least I'm no longer hiding and everything is going according to plan.

I see the path I'm now going to take as God's answer to my prayers. I'm not afraid of the English government. On the contrary, I have the greatest confidence in it and I firmly hope that it will not deport a poor man who was sentenced to physical destruction in Russia for his faith and then fled to England.

"Do you have other clothes?" the captain asks me, looking at my exile clothes.

"No, but tomorrow I'll have other clothes."

"Where are you going to get them from?"

"I don't know, but tomorrow I'll be wearing different clothes," I answer confidently.

"Good, then come tomorrow at 9 o'clock."

"Well, what does the old man say?" I'm bombarded in the stoker's cabin as I come from the captain.

I briefly tell them about my conversation with the captain.

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Fritz sighs with relief when he hears that I didn't betray him.

"Now we have to dress the guy differently," say the stokers, and now it begins. One gives me a coat, another a shirt, the third sells me a brand-new pair of blue sailor's trousers for Russian money. They are much too long for me, but he hems them up at the bottom and that's how it goes. The fourth gives me a handkerchief and a tie.

Suddenly the door opens and the second mate comes in with a book under his arm. I recognize him at first glance; it is the gentleman with whom I spoke for the first time in Archangelsk by the loading area about my escape. The ship on which I fled to England was therefore the same one that left Archangelsk two days after that conversation. But I say nothing and want to see whether the gentleman will recognize me. He asks me for my name, place and date of birth, whether I have relatives or acquaintances in Germany, and writes everything down in the book. Then he looks at me searchingly and asks:

"Are you the man who spoke to me in Archangelsk?"

"Yes, that's me."

"Turn around!"

He looks at me in profile and says:

"Yes, it's you. Back then you had a beard and looked different."

The next day he accompanies me to the train station. I am very happy that I got to see this gentleman again, because now I know that my rescue ship is the first German ship that I saw in Archangelsk.

It had left Archangelsk, went to another port and then returned to the loading area near our concentration camp.

The next morning I put on my new clothes and go to the captain. He is standing up on the bridge. I greet him and when he sees me in my colorful costume he laughs and exclaims: "Yes, indeed, you look different now!"

We sail to Hull, where the captain asks the German consul for advice on what to do with me. I am sent to the emigrants' office and the captain and the consul's secretary accompany me. There they interrogate me, write down the address of my uncle Johann Schmidt in Canada and give me my first ID card, which says that I came to England as a stowaway. Then they phone and soon a policeman in civilian clothes appears and politely asks me if I want to come with them, which I of course say yes to. He takes me to the German consulate first, where I say goodbye to the captain.

I immediately go to the police office. There they give me a good lunch and treat me very kindly. I can hardly believe that I am among policemen. The first thing I ask is whether I am going to be sent back to Russia. They reply:

"You are going from England to Canada, because we are not sending you back to Russia."

I breathe a sigh of relief, because anything else but back to Russia, to the horrible, terrible land of the G.P.U.

From the police I am taken to a prison, where the

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prisoners usually only stay for one day. There I meet two German sailors. They had been drinking in the city at night and missed their ship. They were caught by the police and locked up. When they heard my fate, the oldest, a 50-year-old man, said:

"We're getting an identity card from the consul in the next hour and then we'll take another ship to Hamburg. Write something quickly and we'll take it with us to Germany."

I tear a sheet of paper out of my notebook and write in brief bullet points who I am, where I was born, how I came to England and mention that I have a former school friend and colleague in Germany who is now a teacher somewhere there, but I don't know his address.

The sailor puts the paper in his pocket and promises to deliver it to Hamburg. After a month I get a reply from my colleague in Germany; my letter had reached him. It was Dr. W. Quiring.

I am in police custody for a week. Then I am taken to the state prison. When I get up there on the first morning and the doors of our cells are opened for a walk, I see a notice with my name next to my cell. I read it and look to see if my neighbor has one too. Since he asked for one, I go over and read what is written on his. He comes over to me and watches me.

"I am not English," I say to him.

"A ja rutzij!" (And I am a Russian) he answers in Russian. "What fate has brought you here?"

A Russian, and in prison here? Is he a communist? I think ,and speak to him only in German, as if I can't speak Russian. But every time he sees me, he starts asking excited questions about how I got to England.

Finally, I tell him that I'm on my way to visit my uncle in America, but I don't have a passport, and that I've been arrested here in England. As soon as I have my passport, I'll travel on.

He then tells me briefly his story and that of his friend Ivan.

They are Ukrainians, were arrested with their fathers, spent half a year in the G.P.U. prisons and were then banished to the primeval forests of Archangelsk, where they had to cut wood under terrible conditions. In the spring they were banished to a concentration camp near Archangelsk. They also had to load wood onto foreign ships, hid in the hatches and escaped. They were down there in the hatches on the high seas for six days. They had previously hidden bread, canned food and a couple of bottles of water in the wood. But then they got seasick down there, the water ran out and they were close to dying.

The older one wanted to crawl out through the air duct, but his friend Ivan said: "Oh, never mind, we're going to die anyway, we want to die here."

But the older one gathered all his strength and climbed out through the air duct. He was found by the sailors. When the captain saw him, he scolded him, but the sailors brought him something to eat and drink.

Then he briefly signaled to them that there was another one in the hatch, and they took him out also.

From then on they worked on the ship until they got to England, where they were picked up by the police and put in prison. When I heard their story, I didn't hold back any longer and said: "I am also an exile and escaped from the concentration camp in Archangelsk," and I told them my story.

The poor Russians have no idea what will be done to them. When they ask the guards, they get the answer that they will be sent back with the next Russian ship. That would have been certain death for them, and poor, shy Ivan could hardly sleep at night for fear. Finally, I advise them to write a petition in which they briefly explain to the English government why they had fled from Russia and ask that they not be sent back to certain death.

Every prisoner has a slate in his cell. The Russians wrote their petition in Russian on the slate, I translated it into German, they signed the petition and I handed it in.

Two weeks later they were released, and soon after I was also allowed to leave the prison, where I felt like I was in a first-class hotel compared to Russia's prisons and concentration camps.

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Hull, August 30, 193..

My suitcases and everything are packed for the trip to Germany. Yesterday, as I was writing letters, the secretary of the German consulate suddenly came and told me that I could still go to Germany today if I wanted to, because Canada was closed and was no longer accepting emigrants. "I want to!" is my short answer, and soon after we are at the German consulate, where the last details of the departure are still being arranged. Then the consul hands me a ticket for the steamer "Schwalbe", I thank him warmly for all his love and effort and say goodbye to him.

Germany

"Schwalbe." That is the name of the steamer I am on. When I was introduced to the captain on board, he said happily: "Are you from Russia? I have been to Russia too."

"Where were you then, if I may ask?"

"I was a prisoner of war for a few years in Praetoria in the boys' middle school."

"In Orenburg?"

"Yes, in Orenburg."

"What, really in Orenburg, in Praetoria? That is the school I finished nineteen years ago. Then I went to Siberia and never came back to that area. Do you also know the river Gussicha and the German villages along it?"

"Of course, of course, how could I not know the beautiful river? We prisoners of war have fished many times on it.

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I also know the villages, Chernoye Osero (Black Lake) and Kamyshewoye (Reed Village) well, because we often went there."

"What do you say? Kamyshewoye is the village where we lived and where I spent my boyhood."

There was a lot to talk about now, because we found several mutual acquaintances. How the memories of my school days came flooding back to me! Orenburg with its mountains, valleys and rivers, the cradle of my youth, how you lie so far, far behind me! And yet I feel as if I can still see you lying before me today, you familiar valley of the Gussicha, where I went to school for ten years and spent my boyhood.

"Schwalbe." It rocks and sways gently on the waves. We have left England and are heading for Germany. I have a second-class cabin and am now travelling under completely different conditions than two months ago from Archangelsk to England. Now I am travelling to Germany as a free man through God's wonderful guidance, and only in my dreams do I still have the memory of the hardship I have experienced.

"Schwalbe." Monday, September 1st, 193..

We have been travelling on the Elbe all night. A beautiful, picturesque bank stretches out to the left, and the lights of Blankenese shine as if from a magical land.

So now I am in Germany, the land of which I have read so much, the land of Schiller and Goethe, the land of my ancestors! What a feeling to see this country, the dream of my youth, now!

We are here, and we will soon drop anchor. Hamburg's lights are already flashing towards us. Hello, old German fatherland!

At sunset I arrive in the refugee camp in Mölln.

The next evening there is a farewell celebration in the camp's large prayer hall, because a group of refugees are leaving Germany to find a new home in Brazil. At the end of the celebration the singers sing the song by H. von Redern:

Even if I don't know the way, you know it well,
that makes the soul calm and peaceful.
It is in vain that I worry and struggle,
that my heart beats anxiously, be it late or early.
You do know the way, you know the time,
your plan is already finished and ready.
I praise you for the power of your love,
I praise the grace that has brought me salvation.
You know where the wind blows so stormily from,
and your command, never comes too late.
So I waited quietly, your word is without deception,
You know the way for me, that is enough.

It makes a deep, indescribable impression on me. I don't know where my family is now, but He does know, and He knows the path they too must take.

At this farewell party there was also a Mrs. Toews, whose husband was in the Butyrki with me in Russia, although not in the same cell. As a former teacher and preacher, he was also accused of counter-revolution and banished to the far north for five years. His wife went to Brazil, and he himself died in exile in the north.

The poem "In the Melting Pot" at the beginning of this book is his.

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Mölln, September 17, 193..

Many thanks and praise be to God, I have news from my family! This morning the postman came in and gave me the following card:

"Dear Gerhard!
We received your letter of August 13 today. Now we are happy. As much as your wife cried before, the joy is now just as great.
Dear Gerhard, don't worry about us and your family. Your family is healthy. Your boy is going to school.
How happy we are, how happy we are!
Don't be sad, everything will be fine.
Warm greetings from everyone, everyone
Your ....

A short but meaningful card. So my family is safe and not banished, as I feared and as I was told in Moscow. It was not for nothing that I entrusted them to my God. He looked after them and took them into his care. How happy, how fortunate I am! I haven't heard from them for half a year, and now such good news. How grateful I am to our Lord and Father for that. But with my thanks comes a new request for protection and preservation of my family from the watchful eyes of the G.P.U., because even though they have been spared so far, they are still in Soviet Russia and therefore in great danger. But I confidently hope for continued preservation and protection and for a happy, happy reunion.

Through night to light

Years of separation

My family waited outside Moscow for three weeks for me to return from prison, because the Chekist who arrested me had assured my wife that I would be back in two days. One day, G.P.U. men came to her and told her that she should leave Moscow in 48 hours. What should she do? I would probably not return, but would be exiled like all the others. If she did not want to be exiled with our boy, she would have to leave Moscow in 48 hours. She got ready and moved in with a relative who supported her for half a year. Then she returned to our homeland, where she lived with my youngest brother for a year.

In the spring, another great wave of banishment swept through Russia. The poor had already been deprived of everything, but many were still living in their empty houses. The misery of 1930, when many hundreds of thousands of peasants were dekulakized, i.e. plundered and banished to the far north, began again.

It was a Sunday, an important village meeting had taken place. Comrade Schnegelberger, the district chairman, a communist from Germany, called it. There was something special in the air, and a certain sultriness, like before an approaching storm, weighed on the minds of the peasants. What will the terrible Schnegelberger do next?

My sister-in-law just came into the room and said to my wife:

"Schnegelberger from the district has come, and I think he wants to make more kulaks again!"

They cast a glance at the street and scream in terror. Four men, Comrade Schnegelberger in the middle, are coming down the street. With wide eyes and bloodless lips, everyone is staring at the street and following every move of the dreaded "four". Where will they stop? Everyone knows that they bring death and destruction. "Oh, now they're turning into our parents' house!" screams my wife.

"No, thank God, they're passing by," comes like a wave of relief from her chest.

"Lisa, they're coming to us, they're turning into our yard! Oh, what will happen now?"

She quickly gathers her papers and my letters together, hurries out the back door and hides them outside. Then she comes back and hears Schnegelberger's question: "Does Mrs. Fast live here?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"She just went out, here she comes."

"Are you Mrs. Fast?"

"Yes."

"Show us everything you have."

"I should show you what I have? I have nothing left."

"What, you have nothing? But the bed is yours, you have to sleep somewhere?" He points to a bed in the room.

"No, I sleep on the bed, but it belongs to my brother-in-law, with whom I live, because I don't have one. You know, I only recently came from Moscow and have nothing left. I had to spend the little we had left in Moscow, and my husband is gone too."

"But those suitcases are yours, because I see they are from Moscow!"

"One belongs only to me, the other to my brother-in-law, who was also in Moscow."

"Open the suitcase!"

The order is followed. The suitcase contains only a few items of clothing. The entire "fortune" is written down on paper, and my wife has to sign that she has nothing else.

When they have finished writing it down, they stand up, and Comrade Schnegelberger says in a raised voice:

"Mrs. Fast, get ready, in 24 hours you and your boy will be banished to the far north of Siberia. Here, sign that you will not leave the village during this time."

With a trembling hand she writes her name under the paper held out to her.

"Goodbye, Mrs. Fast," says Schnegelberger with a sneering look and leaves the room with the others to continue his executioner duties.

The same thing happened in other families. Everyone was to be banished. They did not know where to, but to the far north of Siberia, that was certain. Four, five or more families were to be banished from every village. They were the so-called kulaks.

They were desperately poor, because the government had already taken everything from them. Those who stayed behind collected flour, eggs and butter so that the poor could bake something for the long, difficult journey.

The poor women and mothers baked their last bread in their homeland. Many no longer had a husband, because he had been languishing for months in the dungeons of the G.P.U. or in exile. Their thin, pale children repeatedly surrounded the poor mother at the baking trough and bombarded her with questions. "Mummy, are we going to see Daddy now? Will we find him in exile? Will he be where we end up?" "I don't know, children, just go and play."

When they are outside, a couple of big tears run down their cheeks and fall into the dough. So the poor mother wets the last bread that she bakes for herself and the children for the journey to death with her tears.

The next day my wife goes to see Comrade Schnegelberger and shows him a certificate from the mayor of Mölln stating that I am in Germany and the entry permit from the German consulate.

"These papers won't help you. You will be banished like all the others. Be careful not to leave the village!"

"Where should I go? My husband is gone, I have no money either, I must stay here and be banished. I can't escape."

Two days pass like this. Early the next morning there is a knock on the window. My wife jumps up in alarm. Now they are here to get us, she thinks. But no, it is the neighbor's voice:

"Mrs. Fast, are you there?"

"Yes."

"Thank God! The others are all gone."

At midnight, when everyone was asleep, the kulaks' houses were surrounded, the people awakened and taken away.

They were not allowed to say goodbye to anyone, some had their baking in the yard of the house next door, and they were not allowed to get them either, and they were left behind. The poor were not allowed to leave the house for a single step, but only quickly climbed into the wagons that had been brought up, and then they were sent off into exile.

My brother, who worked in the village council, later told my wife that he had been suddenly wakened at midnight. They gave him a list of those who were to be exiled.

Now my brother's family is being exiled, and I still have to guard the house so that they don't escape, he thinks, trembling, and casts a frightened glance at the list, "but, thank God, your name wasn't on it, you were spared!"

The two papers that my wife had received from Germany were, in God's hands a means of saving her. People probably said to themselves, the man is in Germany. If we banish his family now, he will make a big deal out of it, and they don't want that. The rest of the world shouldn't find out about anything.

My wife immediately drove to her parents, who lived twenty kilometers away, to bring them the good news that she had been spared exile this time. On the way she met the train with the exiles

who silently raised their hands in a final salute. It was a living funeral procession.

Today almost none of them are still alive. My parents' neighbors were exiled with their five children and all of them perished and starved in northern Siberia. Two of my former colleagues were arrested in Moscow at that time. Their wives were sent back home, but had nothing left because everything had been taken from them before they fled to Moscow, and they had to beg. They too, all kulak wives, were exiled with their children and both starved to death there in the winter.

The children, the oldest of whom were barely ten years old, wrote to their grandmother: "Dear grandmother, send us something to eat, we are so hungry! Mom is dead and can't give us anything anymore. As long as she was alive, she still gave us her share of the bread, but now she is dead and we get nothing."

The father had been torn from the family outside Moscow, was still languishing in prison and could not help his poor children. The grandmother, who received this hunger letter from her grandchildren, had nothing either, because she was one of the kulaks, the disenfranchised. Her nerves failed in the face of all this hardship and she lost her mind. Day in, day out she sits and cries. The little ones up there in the north of Siberia have long since died of starvation. What a shock it will be for the poor fathers when they hear the sad news of the tragic death of their families!

Another farmer from our village, who at that time

was also banished with his wife and six children, wrote to our home village in the autumn of the same year: "Help, help, we are starving! We eat everything we can get our hands on, we are swollen from hunger and will starve if help does not come soon!"

The distress call was sent on to me and at my request the missionary group "Light in the East" sent him a food package, but it was already too late for him, because the next letter brought me news of his death. He had starved to death.

My parents-in-law's neighbor, an old grandmother, who was also banished at the time, wrote from exile: "Every day I have to go out to work in the wood in deep snow and in great cold. If I stay at home, I won't get any food, and I'm so tired and exhausted, I can't go on!"

She was an old, weak woman, and her husband is desperate in prison.

But who can describe all the misery that the poor had to endure during the terrible transport by wagon, rail, and ship, and in the place of exile itself! Here are a few extracts from two letters from such exiles:

"We were taken by rail to Tomsk. There were already many thousands lying in the open air on the bank of the river. Three cargo ships were coupled together and six thousand people were loaded on: men, women, and children, as well as eighty horses, thousands of wagons, plows, and other farm implements. It was so full that there was literally not a foot of space left, and then there was the disorder and unsanitary conditions.

There was only one lavatory on each ship, with long queues day and night. The conditions on this voyage are beyond description.

After four days we arrived at our destination and were unloaded. Here we lay in a large primeval forest for four days under the open sky. Because it rained a lot, our beds and everything else got wet and damp. My wife and Katharina went to a Russian village a kilometer away and were given a small, smoky log cabin, five meters long and five meters wide, by compassionate people. It was a Russian banya (a primitive bathhouse). You heat up a stone, and the smoke has to escape through the window and door. When the stone is hot enough, you close the door and window, pour water on the stone and in this way you get a steam bath. The bathhouses are usually on the banks of the river.

We put in an oven and stove and moved in happily, because we had already spent twenty-seven days and nights under the open sky on the trip. We now at least had a roof over our heads, but many of us lay in the open air for months, and hunger, wetness and cold wreaked havoc on the poor exiles.

Another writes: "In my youth I served as a stable boy for twelve years, and later, when I worked hard with my wife, God blessed us and we were happy about the blessing. But we can also thank him for leading us down this path. We have come a great deal closer to the Lord. We know that our life is constant losing. We lose in the flight of

time: youth, beauty, strength, wealth. But if we gain eternal life through this loss, what harm does it do? We lose nothing and gain everything.

We were also branded as kulaks and banished to the far north of Siberia, where we were supposed to cultivate the forest. There we met some who had been banished there on January 25th from the station of Issil Kul near Omsk and had survived. They had experienced much more terrible things than we had.

Forty thousand people were banished to the north in one day. The old women, children and sick people who could not walk were loaded onto 490 sledges, and the rest had to walk. In a cold of 40 degrees below zero, the poor were driven north through ice and snow and primeval forest. The commissioner who accompanied them was a former prison inmate. They only had the bare necessities of clothing and bedding, because the rest had been taken from them.

The first night in the open air at 40 degrees Celsius, many children froze to death. The wolves accompanied them, and so the death trail continued for a month and a half. When they arrived at their destination, only 20,000 of the 40,000 were still alive, and no children survived. Even there they had no accommodation, because they had to cut wood and build barracks. It was as if the women had been able to resist even longer than the men, but slowly and surely the others there are also perishing.

We often cry out: Has God forgotten to be merciful? Our plea to God is that such misery should not take root in any other country.

Is there no international law to put a stop to such horrific mass murder?"

For two years my wife fled back and forth in Russia because they kept trying to banish her. In order to finally have peace, she fled to the north, where there were already exiles.

There she submitted a request and asked for permission to leave the country. They promised to respond in two to three months. Half a year passed, but there was no response. So she finally drove herself with our son to the city 500 kilometers away.

There, after a long cross-examination, she finally received the following response from the responsible authority: "We will not let you go to Germany."

"Why not?"

"We have found nothing good about you. We arrested your husband and expelled him from the country as a counter-revolutionary. You will not be given permission to leave the country."

"And once we have been naturalized in Germany, will you let us go?" asked my boy.

"We will never allow you to be naturalized in Germany. We have expelled your father abroad, but you will never get permission to leave!"

That was it. That was their last hope, and now that too was cut off. "What will they do to us now? They will arrest and banish me too," my wife wrote to me.

My relative, with whom they had been living for so long, had moved away with his family a few months ago,

and now they lived alone as Germans in this city. Every day they waited with fear and anxiety for the visit of the G.P.U. "You will get an answer in fourteen days," the Chekist had said as he left. What other answer could that be than arrest!

One day passed after another, but the dreaded visit from the G.P.U. did not come. So it became October. Then came the passport revision. According to a new passport law, passports were checked in cities all over Russia. The aim was to cleanse the cities of harmful elements, i.e. the kulaks and the disenfranchised. Everyone had to prove their social origins. Anyone who could not prove that they had the right to vote did not get a passport. They had to leave the place within a few days, and were not allowed to move to large cities and collectivized villages, but had to stay in the north of Russia. If they did not leave the place within the given time limit, they were arrested and banished.

The passport revision began in the winter of 1933 in the large cities of Moscow, Petersburg, Kharkov and others. Now it had come here. Passports were demanded. My family did not have one, because when they had fled our homeland for the last time, they had not been given one because they had been outlawed, voiceless and without rights for years. When they demanded passports, they could only produce a simple identity card from the village where they had lived in the summer.

My wife was afraid of the G.P.U., so our fourteen-year-old son had to do everything. Anyone who doesn't have a proper passport is subjected to strict interrogation by the G.P.U.

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When our son appears, the Chekist asks: "Where is your father?"

"In Germany."

"What is he doing there?"

"I don't know."

"What were you before, when your father was still here?"

"A farmer."

Then he asked how many horses, cows, etc. we had.

"Where is your mother? What does she do at home? Why doesn't she work?"

"She can't, she has to run the house and she's not very healthy."

"What do you live on?"

"My father sends us money from Germany every month."

"Prove it!"

"How can I prove it? We get money from our father every month and that's what we live on."

"Bring me the proof!"

A message has just arrived after a new transfer from Germany. The boy runs home, gets the message and shows it.

"Good, you get the pass. You can pick it up tomorrow evening."

When he went there the next day, he actually got the passport. Now they at least had the Russian passport and could stay there. It was lonely as the only German family there in the north, but they no longer had to worry about being deported or even banished.

Later, my wife unexpectedly met a

exiled German family who lived in a neighboring village. Since then, they met almost every day and shared joys and sorrows with each other. They celebrated Christmas together in complete silence and sang the old German Christmas carol in a quiet cell: "Silent Night, Holy Night ..."

Our reunion

..................March 7, 1934.

Dear Gerhard!

Today we can also send you some good news. An hour ago a woman was here and I had to sign that I would go straight to the authorities. You can imagine how my blood got pumping again. It was joy and fear at the same time, but the fear was much greater because I couldn't know what would happen and we are already so scared.

Our son was still at school. I quickly went to Regehrs with the paper. They said I should just be quiet because they also thought there was something wrong with our departure. To my delight, Uncle Regehr offered to come with me, but quickly withdrew and preferred to let his wife come with me because he is the most frightened person there is and is shaking as if he were having St. Vitus' dance. When we got to the office, there was only one official there with whom we could speak. She asked whether I had submitted an application for release from Soviet citizenship, which I said I had. Whether I already had the German passport. I replied that I didn't have it yet, but it was on the way. She then said:

"I inform you that you are free to travel to Germany. It is a pity that you do not yet have the German passport. This is a copy of your discharge, and in the government town, where you must now go with the German passport, you will be given the rest. With that you have to go to the German embassy in Moscow."

I was so unspeakably happy that everything went so quietly and that I wasn't questioned too much. I have never been so happy, because from the beginning, all these four years, I was afraid that they wouldn't let us go because you came to Germany later and differently than all the others.

Glory to God for everything! He helped us! If he continues to support us and if it is his will, then we will see each other again soon.

Until a happy reunion soon!

I received this news on March 16. My joy was indescribable. Would she finally be able to get out? There seemed to be no more obstacles from the Russian side, and I knew that it wouldn't be Germany's fault. We had been naturalized this winter. I had sent my wife a certificate of this. She submitted it with the request that she should finally be released from Soviet citizenship, and this was the answer to this. It is a beautiful spring Sunday, a week before Pentecost. The telephone rings. A telegram: "Leaving today, 11 p.m., Moscow, Negoreloje, Berlin. Elisabeth."

In the afternoon I go to Berlin and the next day

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I am at the station "Friedrichstraße" where all the trains from abroad, from the east, come but I couldn't find them. But they should have come. Where could they have gone? Could the G.P.U. have finally pulled them out at the border? They could have done anything. But no, they will come tomorrow, they may have stopped off on the way.

I'm going to a friend's house for the night. Tired from walking around Berlin, I soon fall asleep after I have commended my family to God once again.

I've just fallen asleep when I hear a shout:

"Fast, Fast, get up!" When I open my eyes, several friends are standing in the doorway calling my name.

"What's going on?" I ask, quite astonished by this late visit.

"They're here!"

"Who?"

"Your family!"

"Who? Where? In Wernigerode? Did someone call?"

"No, no, they're standing here waiting for you, just hurry!"

I'm up in one leap, and we'll see each other again. Now they were here, really here, and it was no dream, as it so often had been.

The journey from Moscow to Berlin had gone very well. They had to stop at the German border for a medical examination and therefore did not arrive on the expected trains.

I had waited four long years for this hour, and finally it comes to me in my sleep. "He gives it to his own while they are sleeping."

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Conclusion

Now we are in Germany, in the beautiful, free country, in the homeland of our fathers! We are saved, but over there, millions are still languishing and longing for a brotherly hand to save them. The world does not care about those millions who have to endure a terrible fate. People either do not believe it, or take it for granted. The whole world buys this blood wood, which paralyses their own timber industry, the bread that is forcibly taken from the starving peasants in Russia.

"Have they no mercy on us?" writes a mother of seven underage children. "We thought that other countries would accept us, but no one seems to care about us. We must perish miserably here!"

"Don't think that you have been sent here to serve your time. No, you will never see your homeland again, because you are a harmful element that we want to physically destroy here," we were told on the White Sea, and we had to convince ourselves of the truth of these words every day.

My rescuer from Russia was a communist. He had been a workers' delegate in Soviet Russia a few years ago, where he had only been shown splendors. He came back to Germany and made propaganda for communism. But when he saw the misery and suffering of the exiles up there on the White Sea, he tore up his party membership card and wanted nothing more to do with communism. He saved me at the risk of his own life.

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I am convinced that ninety percent of those who still flirt with communism today would do the same if they saw the Russian misery as it is.

But we Christians know that Soviet Russia also has a far greater power than that of Stalin and his dehumanized assistants. It is our Lord and Master, the Lord of all Lords and King of all Kings, who leads the course of the world through night and storms to a blessed end.

I think back to the beginning of the first Five-Year Plan. One day I was walking through the vaults of the state universal warehouse in the center of Moscow. The Five-Year Plan for the fight against religion was depicted in a shop window.

The picture showed the Orthodox Church, the Mohammedan Mosque, the Jewish Synagogue and the prayer houses of the various free churches in a colorful jumble. The expelled priests, rabbis, mullahs and other clergymen lay in front of the churches, their faces distorted with fear. From above, a huge spear with the inscription "Five-Year Plan" shot down like lightning, smashed the churches and bored deep into one of the rabbi's eyes and through the other clergymen.

Below it was the inscription: "After the end of the Five-Year Plan, there will be no more churches, no priests, no belief in any god in Soviet Russia, because the Five-Year Plan will completely do away with all this rubbish."

I stood in front of the window for a long time and looked at the gruesome picture. Now and then a passerby stopped,

looked at the picture briefly and then walked on in silence. It was at a time when the fighting was at its most terrible, and when every day two long trains of exiles passed Moscow, bound for the far north and Siberia, filled with men, women, old people and children. The communists seemed to be right, the churches closed en masse and the spiritual songs fell silent, like the songs of birds at the first gust of wind in a sultry thunderstorm.

After a few weeks I was in the Moscow prison Butyrki. No ray of hope seemed to penetrate the thick prison walls, behind me the wringing of my dear relatives, around me the desperate, sorrowful faces of the other prisoners, in front of me exile and death. Then I see that verse of the song on the wall:

And if the world were full of devils
and wanted to devour us.
we would not be afraid,
we would still succeed.

At the last party congress, Yaroslavsky, the leader of the League of Warlike Atheists, had to admit that they had not succeeded. Churches were demolished or converted into anti-religious museums and flour warehouses, thousands of clergymen and hundreds of thousands of believers of the most diverse religious denominations were banished and murdered, but their prophecy of the complete eradication of religion from the hearts of men did not come true. Yaroslavsky and his team had to admit this, albeit with gritted teeth, before the leaders of the Communists at the last All-Russian party congress,

and his foaming incitement to a new battle, to a new storm against religion and God, only brings a faint, impotent smile to the faces of his party comrades.

All the effort, all the innocently shed blood of martyrs has been of no avail, for just as almost two thousand years ago, after a horrific Good Friday, the victorious "He lives, He is risen!" rang out from the triumphant mouth of angels to the trembling women and disciples on Easter morning, so today, despite all the oppression, the glorious "Khristos voskres!" (Christ is risen) still echoes through the streets of Moscow, Petersburg and other cities and villages of Russia on the silent Easter night.

Is this not visible proof of the final victory of our Lord and King? No matter how much blood his faithful disciples shed, the day will come when the shadows of death that still hover over believers today will be over, when he will appear in power and glory, and when his enemies, like the guards at the grave, will fall to the ground in shock and fear as if they were dead.

But there, beyond the shadows of night, the song of joy of the redeemed resounds:

"Christ is risen!"

from eternity to eternity.

Fast, Gerhard G. (1894-1974) [#368431]

The Messenger obituary: 1974 Feb 12 p. 7

Birthdate: 1894 Apr 10

Text of obituary:

Reverend Gerhard Fast

St. Catharines, Ont.

The death of His saints is precious before the Lord. Ps. 116.15.

Preacher Gerhard G. Fast, 11 Hillcrest Ave., died suddenly in St. Catharines General Hospital on Tuesday, Jan. 22, '74, in his 80th year. Cause of death: heart attack. The funeral was Friday, Jan. 25, 1974, at 2 p.m. in Scott St. M. B. Church, of which he was a member. The many flowers and mourners testified to the love for the deceased servant of God. It was a large funeral. Because Brother Fast was known for his writing and his books, many people also came from other communities. The coffin with the body was brought into the church while Sister Peter Block played the organ. Sister Fast, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren followed. Brother Abram Block, our leader, said the introductory prayer and read the biography in both languages. The hymn "My home is there in the heights" was sung by the congregation.

Elder Johann Wichert, Vineland, who worked a lot with Brother Fast in the spiritual field in Germany after the Second World War, was the first to speak in German. He read Matthew 25:23 and emphasized two main ideas: First: "Oh, you pious and faithful servant." Second: "Enter into the joy of your Lord." Very appropriate at the funeral of a preacher. Then followed a song from the trio: "Here on earth I am a pilgrim."

Brother Abram Block spoke in English on the text from 2 Tim. 4:6-8. He emphasized the thoughts: "I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith; I have finished the race."

Main thought: "In the service of the Lord":
A. The time period of God is over.
B. The obligation in the task.
C. The recompense or reward after the work done.

Then followed a song from the trio: "When at last I am at home."

Brother Abram Block said the closing prayer and the body was driven to Victoria Lawn Cemetery for burial.

Brother Gerhard Epp ministered at the graveside with words from Daniel 12:2-3 and prayer. A funeral meal followed in the basement of the church. Brother Peter Funk, who worked a lot with Brother Fast, including in Sunday school, made brief remarks and said grace.

After the meal, preachers Peter Klassen and Alexander Schroeder, who had worked with Brother Fast in the German Language Association, also spoke a few words. Preacher David Duerksen made closing remarks and concluded the funeral service with a prayer.

Biography

Gerhard G. Fast [#368431] was born on April 10, 1894 in Lugowsk, Samara, Russia. His parents were Gerhard G. Fast [#368432], mother née Esau [#368433]. He spent his childhood here. When he was 15, his parents moved to the Mennonite colony of Slavgorod in Western Siberia. He studied at the central school in Orenburg and in Tomsk he took his teacher's exam and took a job in Kleefeld, where he worked as a teacher for 15 years. He found his wife in Elisabeth Siebert [#368419] and they were married on August 15, 1917.

The Lord gave them two sons, the younger of whom died as a toddler. In 1930 he was arrested outside Moscow and sent to exile on the White Sea for five years. Miraculously, with the Lord's help, he was able to escape after two weeks of arrest. He managed to get to Germany. After four years, with God's help, the family was able to reunite. Here in Germany he served the Lord for many years in the missionary association "Light in the East". During the Second World War he was able to work among the Mennonites in Ukraine, Chortitza and Molotschna and later in the refugee communities in Germany until he emigrated to Canada in 1951. They came to Ontario and he worked for two years as an orderly in the Bethesda Home near Campden.

Then they moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where he worked as an accountant for the Canadian M. B. Conference. In 1959 they returned from Winnipeg to Ontario and lived in St. Catharines, where he did the accounting for various businesses. He also helped many people fill out paperwork. He was always interested in community work, was a preacher, Sunday school teacher; he was always present at community meetings, Bible studies and prayer meetings. He also wrote several books: "In the Shadow of Death", "In the Steppes of Siberia" and the last book "The End of Chortitza".

After a blessed life, the Lord took him to his eternal home quite suddenly on January 22, 1974.

He leaves behind myself, his wife, a son, a daughter-in-law, five grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and two brothers, still in Russia. We do not mourn as those who have no hope; we wait to see each other again.

The grieving spouse and family

Remember your teachers who spoke the word of God to you; consider their end and imitate their faith. Heb. 13:7.

Mennonitische Rundschau 1974-02-13: Vol 97 Iss 7

Prediger Gerhard Fast

(St. Catharines, Ont.)

„Der Tod seiner Heiligen ist wertgehalten vor dem Herrn"

(Ps. 116:15).

Prediger Gerhard G. Fast, 11 Hallcrest Ave., starb Dienstag, den 22.

Januar 1974, plötzlich im St. Catharines General Hospital, in seinem 80. Lebensjahr. Ursache des Todes war ein Herzanfall. Das Begräbnis war Freitag, den 25. Januar 1974, 2 Uhr nachmittags in der Scott-St. M. B. Kirche, deren Glied er war. Die vielen Blumen und Trauergäste zeugten von der Liebe zu dem verstorbenen Diener Gottes. Es war ein großes Begräbnis. Weil Br. Fast durch seine Schreibarbeit und seine Bücher bekannt war, waren viele auch aus anderen Gemeinden gekommen. Beim Orgelspiel von Schwester Peter Block wurde der

Sarg mit der Leiche in die Kirche gebracht, Schwester Fast, Kinder, Enkel und Urenkelkinder folgten. Br. Abram Block, unser Leiter, hielt das

Einleitugns-Gebet und las das L,ebensverzeichnis in beiden Sprachen vor. Das Lied: „Meine Heimat ist dort in der Höh" wurde von der Versammlung gesungen. Ältester Johann Wichert, Vineland, der viel mit Br. Fast nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg in Deutschland auf

geistlichem Gebiet gearbeitet hat, sprach in Deutsch. Er las Matth. 25,

23, und betonte zwei Hauptgedanken:

I. „Fa au getreuer Knecht.

2. „Gehe ein zu deines Herrn Freude." Sehr passend auf einem Begräbnis eines Predigers. Dann folgte ein Lied vom Trio: „Hier auf Erden bin ich ein Pilger."

Br. Abr. Block sprach in Englisch über den Text aus 2. Tim. 4, 6—8.

Er betonte die Gedanken: „Ich habe einen guten Kampf gekämpft, ich habe Glauben gehalten; ich habe den Lauf vollendet."

Hauptgedanke: „Im Dienste des Herrn" A. Die Zeitspanne von Gott

ist zu Ende. B. Die Verpflichtung in frommer und — der Aufgabe. C. Die Vergeltung oder der Lohn nach der vollendeten Arbeit.

Dann folgte ein Lied vom Trio: „Wenn zuletzt ich daheim."

Br. Abr. Block hielt das Schlußgebet und die Leiche wurde nach dem

Victoria Lawn Friedhof zur Beerdigung gefahren.

Br. Gerhard Epp diente am Grabe mit Wort aus Daniel 12, 2—3 und

Gebet. Ein Trauermahl folgte im Kellerraum der Kirche. Br. Peter, Funk,

der viel zusammen mit Br. Fast gearbeit hat, auch in der Sonntagsschule, machte kurze Bemerkungen und hielt das Tischgebet.

Nach dem Essen hatte Prediger Peter Klassen und Alexander Schroeder, die mit Br. Fast in dem Verein der deutschen Sprache gearbeitet haben, auch noch ein Wort. Prediger David Durksen

machte Schlußbemerkungen und brachte die Begräbnisfeier mit Gebet

zum Abschluß.

Lebensverzeichnis:

Gerhard G. Fast wurde am 10. April 1894 in Lugowsk, Samara, in

Rußland geboren. Seine Eltern waren Gerhard G. Fast, Mutter, geborene

Esau. Dort verlebte er seine Kinderjahre. Als er 15 Jahre alt war, zogen

seine Eltern in die mennonitische Kolonıe Slawgorod in Westsibirien. Er

studierte in der Zentralschule zu Orenburg, und in Tomsk machte er

sein Lehrerexamen und nahm als Lehrer eine Stelle in Kleefeld an, wo

er 15 Jahre als Lehrer gearbeitet hat. Er fand in Elisabeth Siebert seine Ehegattin, und am 15. August 1917 hatten sie ihre Hochzeit. Der Herr

schenkte ihnen zwei Söhne, von denen der Jüngere als Kleinkind starb.

Im Jahre 1930, vor Moskaus Toren, wurde er verhaftet und auf 5 Jahre in die Verbannung an das Weiße Meer geschickt. Auf eine wunderbare Weise konnte er mit des Herrn Hilfe nach zwei Wochen Verhaftung entfliehen. Es gelang ihm, nach Deutschland zu kommen. Nach 4 Jahren durfte sich die Familie mit Gottes Hilfe wieder vereinigen. Hier in Deutschland diente er viele Jahre dem Herrn im Missionsbund, „Licht im Osten." Während des Zweiten Weltkrieges, durfte er unter

den Mennoniten in der Ukraine, Chortitza und Molotschna tätig sein, und später in den Flüchtlingsgemeinden in Deutschland, bis zu seiner Auswanderung nach Kanada im Jahre 1951. Sie kamen nach Ontario und er arbeitete zwei Jahre als Krankenpfleger (Orderly) im Bethesda Heim bei Campden. Dann zogen sie nach Winnipeg, Man., wo er als Buchführer für die kanadische MB-Konferenz gearbeitet hat. 1959 kamen sie von Winnipeg wieder nach Ontario und wohnten in St. Catharines, wo er für verschiedene Geschäfte, die Buchführung tat; auch hat er manch einem geholfen, wo er behilflich war, im Papiereausfüllen. An Gemeindearbeit war er immer interessiert, war Prediger, Sonntagslehrer, auf Gemeindeberatungen, Bibelstunden und Gebetsstunden fehlte er nicht. Auch hat er mehrere Bücher geschrieben: „Im Schatten des Todes", „In den Steppen Sibiriens", und das letzte Buch ‚Das Ende von Chortitza". Nach einem segensreichen Leben, ganz plötzlich, am 22. Januar 1974, nahm der Herr ihn zu sich in die ewige Heimat.

Er hinterläst mich seine Gattin, einen Sohn, eine Schwiegertochter, 5

Enkelkinder und 4 Urenkelkinder und zwei Brüder, noch in Rußland. Wir trauern nicht als solche, die keine Hoffnung haben: wir harren auf ein Wiedersehn.

Die trauernde Gattin und Familie

"Gedenket an eure Lehrer die euch das Word Gottes gesagt haben, ihr Ende schauet an und folget ihrem Glauben nach (Hebr. 13:7)

Preacher Gerhard Fast

(St. Catharines, Ont.)

"The death of his saints is precious in the sight of the Lord"

(Ps. 116:15).

Preacher Gerhard G. Fast, 11 Hallcrest Ave., died suddenly Tuesday, January 22, 1974, in St. Catharines General Hospital, in his 80th year. The cause of death was a heart attack. The funeral was Friday, January 25, 1974, at 2 p.m. in the Scott-St. M. B. Church, of which he was a member. The many flowers and mourners testified to the love for the deceased servant of God. It was a large funeral. Because Brother Fast was known for his writing and books, many also came from other congregations. As Sister Peter Block played the organ, the

casket containing the body was brought into the church, followed by Sister Fast, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Br. Abram Block, our leader, led the introductory prayer and read the bibliography in both languages. The hymn, "My home is there on high" was sung by the congregation. Elder Johann Wichert, Vineland, who did much spiritual work with Br. Fast in Germany after World War II, spoke in German. He read Matthew 25:23, emphasizing two main ideas:

1. "Faith, O faithful servant."

2. "Enter into the joy of your Lord." Very appropriate at a minister's funeral. Then followed a hymn from the trio, "Here on earth I am a pilgrim."

Bro. Abr. Block spoke in English on the text of 2 Tim. 4:6-8.

He emphasized the ideas: "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith; I have finished the race."

Main idea: “In the service of the Lord” A. The time of God is over. B. The obligation in pious and — the task. C. The recompense or reward after the work is completed.

Then followed a song by the trio: “When at last I am home.”

Brother Abr. Block held the closing prayer and the body was taken to the Victoria Lawn Cemetery for burial.

Brother Gerhard Epp served at the grave with a word from Daniel 12, 2-3 and prayer. A funeral meal followed in the basement of the church. Bro. Peter Funk, who worked a lot with Bro. Fast, including in Sunday school, made brief remarks and said grace.

After the meal, preacher Peter Klassen and Alexander Schroeder, who worked with Bro. Fast in the German Language Association, also had a word. Preacher David Durksen made closing remarks and concluded the funeral service with prayer.

Biography:

Gerhard G. Fast was born on April 10, 1894 in Lugowsk, Samara, in

Russia. His parents were Gerhard G. Fast, mother, née Esau. He spent his childhood years there. When he was 15 years old, his parents moved to the Mennonite colony of Slavgorod in Western Siberia. He studied at the central school in Orenburg, and in Tomsk he took his teacher's exam and took a job as a teacher in Kleefeld, where he worked as a teacher for 15 years. He found his wife in Elisabeth Siebert, and on August 15, 1917 they were married. The Lord gave them two sons, the younger of whom died as a toddler.

In 1930, outside Moscow, he was arrested and sent to exile on the White Sea for five years. Miraculously, with the Lord's help, he was able to escape after two weeks of arrest. He managed to get to Germany. After four years, with God's help, the family was able to reunite. Here in Germany, he served the Lord for many years in the missionary association, "Light in the East." During the Second World War, he was able to work among the Mennonites in the Ukraine, Chortitza and Molotschna, and later in the refugee communities in Germany, until he emigrated to Canada in 1951. They came to Ontario and he worked for two years as a nurse (Orderly) in the Bethesda Home near Campden. Then they moved to Winnipeg, Man., where he worked as a bookkeeper for the Canadian MB Conference. In 1959, they returned from Winnipeg to Ontario and lived in St. Catharines, where he did bookkeeping for various businesses. He also helped many people, where he was able to help, to fill out paperwork. He was always interested in community work, was a preacher, Sunday teacher, and was not absent from community meetings, Bible studies and prayer meetings. He also wrote several books: "In the Shadow of Death", "In the Steppes of Siberia", and the last book, "The End of Chortitza". After a blessed life, quite suddenly, on January 22nd, 1974, the Lord took him to his eternal home.

He leaves behind his wife, a son, a daughter-in-law, 5 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren and two brothers, still in Russia. We do not mourn as those who have no hope: we wait to see each other again.

The grieving wife and family

"Remember your teachers who told you the word of God, look at their end and follow their faith (Heb. 13:7).