EXILED TO SIBERIA

BY WM. MURRAY GRAYDON.

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(Continued.)

Maurice recognized among them many familiar faces, his fellow voyagers on the convict barge, and he was glad to see that they had escaped the terrible death to which Grodno's crime had so nearly consigned them.

Near the gates stood the office of the prison, a gloomy two-storey building. Soldiers were all around it, some on guard duty, some chatting in groups, others holding fiery black horses, belonging, no doubt, to officers who were inside. The boys were ushered into a large, dimly-lighted room and in a barred enclosure along one side. Around a large table, lighted by a lamp, sat half a dozen stern-looking men in officers' uniforms, among whom Maurice recognized Captain Stanisla, the Cossack captain who recaptured the fugitives, and Lieutenant Brosky. The rest were strangers. The two men were writing at a table near by, and a dozen soldiers occupied a long bench across the room, but all was very quiet and still.

"They are waiting for some person," whispered Maurice to Phil. One of the guards observed the conversation, and rapped the boys sharply on the shoulders with the flat of his sword.

In a very short time wheels rattled up to the door, and a tall, stout man entered the room and took a seat at the head of the table. He had a heavy grey beard and moustache, and was dressed in a summer uniform of light linen. He conversed briefly with Lieutenant Brosky, a proceeding which Maurice gladly noted, and then the trial—if such it could be called—was formally begun.

The boys' suspense was augmented by the fact that all was conducted in Russian.

The first to be examined was Captain Stanisla, who spoke for 10 or 15 minutes, and from stray words understood here and there Maurice knew that he was relating the circumstances of the fire.

At the close of his explanation he was subjected to a close cross-examination. Lieutenant Brosky and the Cossack captain followed with brief addresses, and at this point the prosecution seemed to rest. The officers conferred briefly among themselves, and then, to the utter consternation of the boys, Grodno was called forward.

He advanced eagerly in spite of his wound, and started to speak in an excited voice.

He was speedily compelled to be silent, and to content himself with answering the questions that were put to him.

The interrogations were brief, and as the convict was led back to the pen, he threw a glance of hateful triumph at the boys.

At that moment Maurice lost all hope, and the grave, severe faces of his judges seemed to confirm his belief. He made no attempt to speak, knowing only too well that it would be useless.

The officer in the white suit conferred with his companions, and then, rising to his feet, announced what was evidently the verdict of the court. Grodno gave a loud cry as the words fell from the officer's lips, and then the prisoners were hurried from the room. A few paces beyond the door they were met by Lieutenant Brosky, who whispered to Maurice as they passed hurriedly by:—"You are all sentenced to be shot. Grodno has led infamously. Don't despair yet. I will do what I can."

With these words ringing in their ears the boys staggered across the prison yard, oblivious to everything around them, and sank down in the corner of the cell. The guards went silently away, and even Grodno's piteous wailings from the adjoining cell were unheeded and unheard.

Hours passed, and still they tossed in wretched misery on the hard pallet. Phil broke down completely and cried bitterly, while Maurice, brave lad that he was, could hardly repress his tears. He made no effort to encourage Phil by false hopes, for he knew how precarious was the aid that Lieutenant Brosky had promised. Death stared them in the face. If ever there was an example of the disastrous consequences of bad company, Maurice felt that this was one, and bitterly did he regret having had anything to do with the two convicts.

Grodno, out of revenge, had sworn that the boys were equally guilty with himself, and now they must pay the penalty.

Supper was brought to them, but was left untouched. Neither had any desire to eat. Engrossed in their own sad thoughts, they even paid little attention to each other, pacing the floor constantly and starting nervously at every strange sound from without. So the hours wore on, and night came.

Grodno was silent, and the only sounds that broke the stillness were the heavy tread of soldiers and the occasional rattle of steel. Condemned men are often said to sleep soundly the night before execution, and the boys were no exception. They fell asleep side by side, and only woke when the gray dawn was stealing in at the grated window. Outside were heard strange noises, a steady tramp of feet, a harsh rattle, and then a terrific discharge of firearms seemed to shake the building.

Frightened and amazed, the boys rose to their feet. Footsteps were heard in the corridor. They came nearer and nearer. The door creaked and opened, and Lieutenant Brosky entered, accompanied by two soldiers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RIOT AT IRKUTSK.

"I have been fortunate," he said, in a grave voice. "Grodno was shot outside of the stockade but a few moments ago, and the Turk will suffer the same fate as soon as he can be moved to Tomsk, but your sentence has been commuted, and you will go, instead, to the mines of Kara."

"The mines of Kara!" exclaimed Maurice, blankly, and for the moment, as his mind reverted to what he had read and heard of that dread place, he felt half sorry that their lives had been spared.

Then came a revulsion of feeling, and he thanked the lieutenant warmly for his intercession.

Phil, to whom the mines of Kara meant nothing, fairly broke down and was profuse in his gratitude.

"I did no more than my duty," said Lieutenant Brosky, coldly. "I believed your story, and stated my belief to the governor of the province. He was pleased to commute your punishment. Your original sentence, which I promised to ascertain for you, was ten years at the mines.

"That has now been increased to 30 years, so you can face the worst. Remember that what I have done for you is in return for your assistance when those two ruffians attacked me. Here our intercourse ends. It is not likely that we shall meet again."

As the lieutenant turned to leave the prison Maurice, seeing his last chance slipping away, sprang forward imploringly, but the officer motioned him back, and in an instant the door had closed behind him. "We ought to be thankful that our lives have been saved," said Phil, as Maurice threw himself, face downward, on the bed, and presently he asked, "Where are the mines of Kara, and what are they?"

"You will know when we reach there," said Maurice. "They are gold mines that belong to the Czar, and are nearly 2,000 miles from here. That's all I care to say about them." And in spite of Phil's entreaties Maurice firmly refused to talk any more about the mines of Kara.

They spent two days of gloom and hopelessness in the Tomsk prison, and at daybreak on the third morning they were rudely turned out into the enclosure, which was half-filled with wretched exiles waiting apparently for some event of importance.

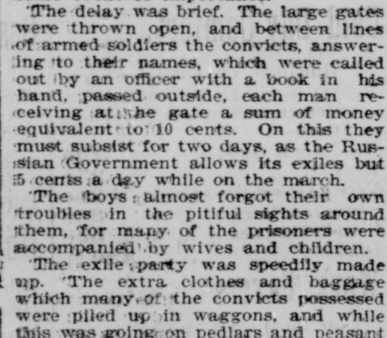
The delay was brief. The large gates were thrown open, and between lines of armed soldiers the convicts, answering to their names, which were called out by an officer with a book in his hand, passed outside, each man receiving at the gate a sum of money equivalent to 10 cents. On this they must subsist for two days, as the Russian Government allows its exiles but 5 cents a day while on the march.

The boys almost forgot their own troubles in the pitiful sights around them, for many of the prisoners were accompanied by wives and children.

The exile party was speedily made up. The extra clothes and baggage which many of the convicts possessed were piled up in waggons, and while this was going on pedlars and peasant women crowded freely in through the guards with various kinds of food, which was bought up eagerly.

At last came the order to start, and the whole column was quickly in motion. A squad of Cossacks, in their handsome green uniforms, led off, and were followed by the disorderly throng of men, women and children marching between three broken lines of soldiers. The infirm and the sick and the very small children came next, riding in telgas—a species of rude waggon—and a sullen convoy of half a dozen Cosacks, guarding the baggage waggons, with their loads of gray bags, brought up the rear.

The boys turned once for a last look at Tomsk, already fast fading on the horizon, and then, with faces pale and stern, they marched away to the eastward, where thousands and thousands march every year—never to return,



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that began with the departure from Tomsk almost defies description. Day

The boys suffered much from the chilling rains.

after day they trudged on, living on the scanty food that their meagre allowance was able to purchase, and sleeping at night in foul, crowded exile station-houses, which are built along the road at intervals of from thirteen to twenty miles.

Every third day they rested, and these halts the boys soon learned to regard with uncontrollable horror, for during the whole twenty-four hours they remained shut up in the close, unhealthy station-houses.

Thus spring passed into summer, and summer turned to autumn, and still the exile party pressed wearily forward, leaving many of their number at different points along the route.

There were times when the boys found it difficult to convince themselves that the past was not all a dream—that they had ever known a brighter, fairer country than this desolate Siberia; and then again there were occasions when the past became all too realistic and vivid, and the remembrance of their hopeless condition and of Vladimir Saradoff's crime sank into their hearts like heated iron.

The boys suffered much from the chilling rains and cold winds that came with the early autumn, and many a weary mile they marched with dripping garments flapping about their aching limbs.

It was on a crisp, cool September evening that Irkutsk was reached, and the sun was setting lightly on the white walls and golden domes of this powerful capital of eastern Siberia when the boys crossed the river on a pendulum ferryboat and entered the streets of the city.

The party now number scarcely 100. Many had died on the way, and many had been left at different points on the route.

Those remaining were either political prisoners or belonged to the most desperate grade of criminals.

To reach the prison the party were compelled to cross a section of the city, and the boys were amazed to see the broad, well-paved streets, the imposing buildings, the shop windows filled with articles of luxury, and the well-dressed people who occupied the sidewalks.

"It seems like a dream," observed Maurice to his companion. "I cannot believe that we are in Siberia. How like an American city this is, Phil, and how long it seems since we left home," he added, sadly. Phil made no reply. He raised his sleeve and brushed away the tears which were rolling down his pale cheeks.

The mournful procession moved on rapidly, attracting but little attention from the people.

The central portion of the city was soon left behind, and they entered a more squalid neighbourhood, with dark, narrow streets and gloomy, dingy houses. The sidewalks now appeared to be more crowded, and from the attitude of the people it seemed as though something unusual were going on.

Multitudes of peasants in red silk and black velvet trousers surged to and fro, singing and shouting, either from excitement or intoxication, probably the latter, for on every street corner was a pedlar's stall, where the fiery vodka was being sold by the glass or the bottle.

"It's a holiday of some kind," whispered Maurice; "the shops are all closed and the people are dressed up in their best."

At that moment the exiles were halted in a small square, surrounded by unusually squalid houses, and instantly an eager and curious crowd had hemmed them in. They were pressed against the soldiers, who tried in vain to drive them back on the sidewalk.

A commotion was now heard in front, and, mingled with the shouts of the people, the boys could distinguish rude music and a hollow beating of drums. An officer galloped along the line, shouting, fiercely:—"Drive the scoundrels from the square. Force your way through with swords and bayonets!"

The Cossacks made an immediate attempt to obey this order, for the column pushed forward a few yards, only to come to a dead halt again between the surging crowds.

The boys were near the front of the column, and, looking over the heads of their companions, they could see a golden image mounted on a pole and strange-looking banners jammed in among the people. "This is a religious festival of some kind," said Maurice, "and those stupid Cossacks have blundered right into it on their way to the prison."

From the crowding and pushing going on in front it looked as though the mob were disputing the passage of the prisoners.

The outcry was loud and violent, and the commands of the officers with difficulty reached the ears of their men.

A close watch was kept on the convicts, and the soldiers threatened with sword and bayonet the excited mob who pressed against them.

Amid all this tumult the convicts maintained the same sullen demeanour, some gazing stupidly on the ground, others carelessly scanning the faces of the people.

Directly behind Maurice and Phil stood a middle-aged man, with a light beard and moustache. He had accompanied the party from Tomsk, and his name was Paul Platoff. This was all that the boys knew concerning him, for, although his refined appearance had tempted them on more than one occasion to make his acquaintance, the recollection of their previous experience always checked them in the act. Turning half round, Maurice saw that this Platoff was gazing into the crowd, with an expression of intense excitement on his features. Had he recognized some friend or acquaintance among the people, or was he meditating a sudden escape, basing his hopes on the hostile attitude displayed toward the soldiers and the murmurs of pity for the fettered convicts?

As these thoughts passed through Maurice's mind the command to march was thundered out by the officer, and the head of the line began to straggle through the now sundered ranks of the procession.

As the men in front of him began to move Maurice turned for another look at Platoff, and on that very instant the convict sprang from the line, wrenched the gun from the grasp of the nearest soldier and, swinging it savagely round his head, plunged in among the people, who made no effort to prevent his escape.

Quick as was this daring deed, it did not escape the guards, and half a dozen Cossacks, from as many different points along the line, raised their rifles and fired at Platoff's retreating form, ignoring the people entirely in their eagerness to arrest the fugitive. The scene that ensued terrified the boys. Cries of pain followed the rifle fire, and as the smoke partially cleared four motionless bodies were seen lying in the dusty road. Paul Platoff was not among them. He had vanished in the crowd. The sight of these innocent victims changed the hostile feelings of the people to a furor of madness.

A Russian mob is always merciless and cruel, always regards a soldier or a gendarme as a born enemy, and now, with shouts of rage that were caught up and re-echoed from every corner of the square, the riotous peasantry closed in on the little group of exiles and soldiers.

For an instant swords and bayonets flashed, and the foremost of the rioters perished by cold steel, but those behind pressed on more furiously than ever.

The situation became critical in the extreme. The troops, few in number as they were, were scattered along the lines, and, being unable to concentrate, were wholly at the mercy of the mob. The tumult was deafening, and with the savage and frenzied yells of the rabble mingled the occasional crack of a rifle or a clash of steel. Up in front the advance guard of Cossacks were making a brave stand, and the rear guard, too, were apparently holding their own, but along the straggled line the soldiers were going down one by one, and missiles of every description were falling thickly among the panic-stricken convicts.

(To be Continued.)

Many men fool with sickness just as a bear fools around a trap. A man doesn't like to own up that he is ill. He says "O, it amounts to nothing. I shall be all right to-morrow." But he isn't all right to-morrow; nor the next day. Pretty soon the trap snaps to; and he has some serious disease fastened on him.

The only sensible course is to keep away from the trap, and not allow sickness to get any hold on you. It is a frightful mistake to trifle with indigestion and bilious troubles in the belief that they will cure themselves. On the contrary they drag the whole system down with them.

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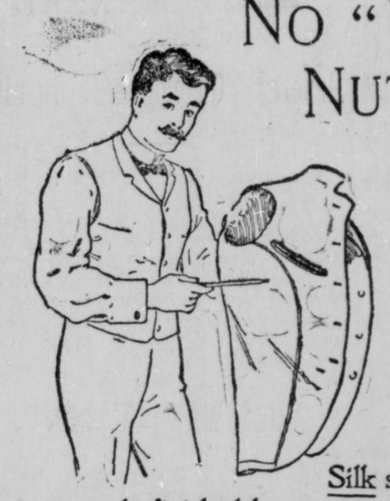

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