Documents

The Life of a Russian Priest

Fr Pavel's life, from early manhood as a shy young teacher before the Revolution to his death in an isolated Siberian village, is recounted in The Unknown Homeland, *a new book to be published shortly by Mowbrays. The Russian typescript recently reached the West and has been translated by Marite Sapiets, a member of the research staff at Keston College. We print below some extracts from* The Unknown Homeland *with the kind permission of the publisher. The first two extracts describe Fr Pavel's arrival at a prison in Irkutsk from Leningrad.*

[pp. 1-5] On a clear, frosty, autumn morning, just before seven o'clock, when the wormwood in the ditches was bright with silvery hoar-frost, a long goods-train drew into Irkutsk; attached to it were two prisoner-wagons. It had taken twelve days altogether to get there from Leningrad, not stopping anywhere for long, except in Omsk. with no connections to transit prisons on the way. All those in the wagons were being sent to the Eastern distribution centre so that they could be transported to the distant villages of Siberia. The prisoners had their names called, they were counted, lined up in pairs and led off across the pontoon-bridge over the Angara river, through the lower reaches of the town, towards Ushakovka.

The prisoner-transport on the march was a "motley crew" – two women from Vologda, convicted of vicious speculation, two embezzlers, a number of robbers and a foursome – a man and three women – with convictions for large-scale burglary. A fat accountant kept falling behind, very much out of breath. He was finding it difficult because of his unseasonably warm coat and he was almost dragging it behind him, letting the full weight of the skunk-fur collar drop almost as far as his elbows. Behind everyone else walked a young man with grey-blue lips, who looked ill – obviously a long-term prisoner. His partner on the march was the only political exile – a scholar and priest, who stood out in the procession because of his unusual height and could hardly keep up with the quick pace of the column. Bent double and gasping for breath, he was carrying a small suitcase in one hand and a bundle of food in the other. The robust Siberian morning irritated his chest, which had not yet become accustomed to long walks and fresh air. During the journey he had dreamed of the walk they would have to take from the station to the prison through the town. In six months of imprisonment, he had forgotten what the noises of a town sounded like and his eyes were dazzled anew by the infinite space of the sky. In the prison-wagon, he had thought that, once he got outside, once he was standing firmly on hard ground after twelve days of swaying backwards and forwards on the train – then everything would be over. There would be no more foul air or overcrowding ... His frequent spells of dizziness, the tight sensation in his chest, would immediately disappear. However, when he had emerged, trembling and

hardly able to stand on his own feet, into the railway yard from which they had been sent off to the bridge, he had felt uncommonly weak, with a heaviness in his arms and legs, as if he had been drinking wine. His head was going round and round and there was a buzzing in his ears. The strange unsteadiness of his body worried him. Would he make it or would he fall down? It did not even occur to him to say anything about his condition; he walked on with only one thought: "I must, I must last out to the end".

Siberia greeted its new guests in festive style with a wonderfully fine morning. Sunshine flowed over the town; the roofs and windows glittered. The watery expanse of the Angara acquired a golden sheen. The travellers were enveloped in the cornflower blue of the skies, reminiscent of spring in the Crimea or autumn round Lake Baikal. Unexplored, unknown Siberia gave him a brief smile, like the smile of home. In the hilly outer fringes of the town, the autumn foliage of the trees glowed yellow, like little amber-coloured lanterns. Before them lay the bridge over the Angara; the Angara was foaming and bubbling, its waters blindingly green and transparent. Such a river should be cased in armour, locked in by cast-iron chains, arches and girders, but here it was trustingly bridged by ordinary wooden boards, with dangerously wide spaces between the lower supports. The stony river bottom looked deceptively close – at a depth of nineteen to twenty-five metres.

When they had crossed the bridge, they all suddenly cheered up and began to chat. Perhaps it was because the spray of the Angara had combined with the air to produce an invigorating breath, or because the freedom they longed for had touched their confined hearts – but all of a sudden someone in front began to laugh; one of the boy thieves whispered in a soldier's ear "Let's have a smoke, old fellow", but the latter snorted, "I'll give you smoking" and turning to the others, who were falling behind, he said, in the tones of an old sergeant: "What are you staring at? Never seen a river before? March on."

It grew hot marching along the riverbank; white dust choked their nostrils. The morning suddenly turned into the heat of day. Everywhere the awakening town began to show signs of life. A woman opened the shutters, rattling an iron bolt. To a keen sense of hearing, which had long been parted from the sounds of daily life, it was wonderful to hear the squeaking of buckets on the end of a yoke, – they were approaching a water-pump. Two small boys, their faces pressed to the window pane, were staring at the column. And all these small novelties of life, the freely-flowing Siberian river, the blue sky, the crowing of cocks, the gold of autumn leaves – all this, like the nearness of freedom, greeted the new arrivals, among them the priest, now falling behind.

One and a half years of imprisonment, alternately in solitary and general confinement, had taken their toll. He had grown weak, he had aged and become feeble, but his spirit was unclouded. On the contrary, he experienced everything in more depth, more acutely. He had even developed a habit of checking the normality of his own responses objectively, but at this point, the fresh current of life, so powerful and bright, was acting on him like a poison. The same thing happens to a starving man, if he is given too much food. The morning air, the seething Angara, the thunder of its crashing waves, like that of the sea, the wide unpaved street, the shutters, the dogs barking, the sound of the water-jet in the pumping-hut, the sheer variety of this food, simple to those whose regular diet it was, delicious but harmful to the prisoner, was almost making him faint. Climbing the hill towards the Ushakovo pass, he was very much out of breath and touched his neighbour's hand with his bundle. "Tired, Father?", asked the latter and whispered to him out of the side of his mouth, almost tenderly, "we'll go slower, to hell with them ..." The pair of them slowed down – the leading guard could not see them, but the other one, who was walking beside him, immediately shouted at them: "No loitering!"

"The old motor's running down for all of us, brothers," whispered the pale prisoner. "You know, when I'd been inside for half a year, in the reformatory, I almost snuffed it. My hands were weak and trembling, my knees quivered

like a nervous young lady's. But when I was going to kill the wife, I was a man of steel!"

"But how could you ... what did you do it for?"

"Another bloke, what else? Teach her not to be a tramp. I swung my arm back and let her have it with the axe. She didn't even give a squeak. All over in a moment. When I think what I ruined my life for! She painted her lips, shaved her eyebrows, looked like a clown. And that's what I ruined myself for, rubbish like that, a bit from the market-place."

It was not the first time in his months of imprisonment that the priest had heard such speeches and still he could not get used either to the morals or to the language of those around him. He understood only one thing: all these people, these pitiful rejects, were his brothers in suffering and in their common lot; like him, all of them felt sorrowful; for them too, it was stuffy and crowded but he could not establish a living link between them and himself and tormented himself with reproaches about his inability to do so and the distance he put between them and himself. He spoke simply and peaceably to everyone, but the people life had brought him into contact with did not understand such a quiet and amiable approach. Then he was tormented even more by his alienation from the general level of those around him. He had always been gifted as a wise and discerning preacher, but now he was far from thinking of any sort of evangelism. That belonged to another life, which had rolled up like a scroll before his eyes and disappeared unexpectedly and stormily. In the great cathedral ... before a gathering of like-minded people, it would have been a different matter – but here, his loftiest words seemed insignificant; here, life itself – a life of retribution and repentance – was the active factor.

On the way to Siberia he had got to know all of them and their life-stories. He knew about each man – what he had been and the reason why he was walking beside him, but their artless accounts of theft, murder and dissipation did not call forth reproaches from him. He only felt sorry that he had no language in common with these men, condemned like himself to exile and the loneliness of a Siberian winter, that they could not exchange thoughts, that they had no store of words they could all understand, which would have made it easier for them to live together ...

"Hurry up, priest! Look lively!" – shouted the guard.

[pp. 7-10] The column had already crossed the bridge, the guard's hut was not far away when suddenly a sound he had not heard for a long time penetrated his consciousness: a churchbell was ringing, the only one remaining in a church which had not yet been closed.

"That's the early service", he thought, "Probably just before the singing of *It is meet and right*". It was amazing how this regular faint ringing had reached the pastor's ears; it was not a minute late, but just before he entered his last prison, it joyfully sang to him of the freedom that was near. To the sound of the bells, the column marched up to the prison and stopped before the main entrance. People shifted from one foot to another, waiting to be assigned to their places.

The most difficult thing was not being able to put his bundle and suitcase on the ground; it was just by the door that his strength deserted him altogether. At last the inspection of documents came to an end. The new arrivals were taken through the first and second barred gates and stood against a wall in the depths of a dark corridor ... A roll-call of surnames began, assigning each prisoner to his cell. There was some perplexed discussion about the priest and where to put him, as he was not a criminal. All the others had gone, he alone was still waiting to be assigned, brushing dust off his cassock with his hand. "Where shall we put the priest? The second floor's full up. Section 12 – but there are no free bunks in it ... Well, we can put in a bunk ... the plank-beds are all taken. That's decided, then – Section 12 ... There are two other politicals in there ..."

In the dark corridor, the scenes of the glowing autumn day disappeared. The usual arched ceiling met his gaze. Two prison orderlies were carrying along a pail of boiling water – for morning tea – on long poles. Everything grew small and narrow, as it had been in the other detention centre, back in Russia ...

A moment's rest ensued. Suitcases, bundles and bags, thrown off people's shoulders, were put on benches; people settled down beside their luggage. Suddenly a whistle sounded, resembling the furious buzz of an enormous beetle.

"To the bath!"

Once again they were lined up; they were each given a piece of soap; those who could snatched a change of underclothes to take with them. Leaving the narrow prison corridors behind them. they emerged into a backyard between prison buildings, where two young cockerels were cheerfully pecking at the ground. They went round a brick wall, near which a black Maria was parked, covered in the dirt of Ushakovo. From there they went on down a sloping square between planks, barrels and bricks, along a narrow alley of the Eastern kind. Were they back in the town? It was hot and dusty; their legs, which felt as if they were made of wood, could hardly move ... They reached the public baths, which had been open from seven in the morning; round the entrance, children were gnawing cedar-nuts, while a half-blind old man was selling birch-brooms. There were also three women there, selling baskets of wild cherries; one of them stepped back to let the column go past, and suddenly caught sight of the priest. Her face trembled, she flushed and tears came into her eyes. Quickly, taking a rouble out of her apron pocket, she thrust it at him, before anyone could see, and whispered pityingly, "Here, father dear, take this, remember the sinner Avdotya in prayer, remember ..."

If he didn't take it, he would offend her. Should he take it? – Beside him and behind him were the guards. The priest's face showed his sorrow and bewilderment; he smiled, thanked her and immediately looked away from the woman ... He even turned his shoulder aside, just so that he wouldn't have to take it. The rouble was taken by the pale man who had killed his wife. He took it deftly, behind the priest's back – it was just then that they were allowed into the bath-house.

Section 12, Cell 124.

The sunny autumn had penetrated even here, in the form of bright, dusty shafts of light, but the dark room with its plank-beds one above the other. looked even more unattractive when lit up to some extent by the windows. In spite of the usual rule, common to all prisons – a weekly bath – there was no general cleanliness. True, every morning the prisoners took turns to wash the floor. Nevertheless, the newly-washed floor, with its cracks and ancient ruts dating from Tsarist times, was soon dirtied and spat on again. Each prisoner almost made an effort to add to the general disorder. One would spit from above right in the middle of the floor, another would crush a cigarette with his foot, while the guard was looking out of the window. Busy families of bugs swarmed over the plasterwork of the old walls; they were constantly being scorched out with boiling water, disappearing and reappearing again. Getting rid of body lice took less time and was also a more thorough procedure – they went through the sanitary ritual once or twice at most.

On the journey, the learned father had been subjected to a great deal of laughter because of the way he shuddered painfully as one or another prisoner ran his fingers over himself, pinching them together. "Never mind, father", laughed the pale girl-murderer, "You could start by squashing just one, that blonde one with the grey back, or they'll end by eating you alive as well." However, the journey was over, the lice had been liquidated, but now, in Section 12, he was suffering from something else – the continuous talking. He could never hide anywhere from it – morning, noon or night – somehow, unexpectedly, the chatter would begin, because of somebody's insomnia, or started by a stool-pigeon, or after a summons to a nocturnal interrogation, which had often happened back in Russia. Almost everyone talked and talked ... And it was all so confused. Even if it had occurred to these people that one of them was ill, suffering to the point of torture from having to listen to unnecessary eruptions of words, they would not have cared – what did it have to do with them? But in conversation, these men burnt up all they had within them – fear, sorrow, the pangs of conscience, nightly boredom, the unknown nature of their sentence – and much else besides ...

In prison Fr Pavel remembers his past life: "golden, detailed memories" fall into his solitude. He remembers his life as a teacher, his evening at the school dance when, paralysed with shyness, he met the beautiful Nina and fell in love. He remembers his decision not to become a monk, but to marry and be ordained priest. Then comes the Revolution and eventually his arrest, imprisonment and exile.

The following extract describes his arrival in the Siberian village of Vikhorevo – his place of exile – where, exhausted and ill, Fr Pavel is taken in by a Siberian peasant, Yevgraf Zakharov, and his wife Tatyana. Fyodor Ukorov, a young prisoner, who had befriended the ailing priest, insists on staying by Fr Pavel's side.

[pp. 195-8] Fr Pavel was leaning against the wall of a house breathing heavily. People shook their heads and gestured helplessly, women sighed and gasped; when they found out they were looking at a priest, each of them invited him to her house.

"However did you get here, my dear? The road to our place is something awful!"

Fyodor was hovering anxiously over Fr Pavel. He had been scared by the priest's sudden attack of breathlessness; he brought him a ladle of water, undid the hooks at the collar of his coat and splashed water on his face from the ladle, but everyone shouted at him: "You'll give him a chill, it's not summertime, we should get him inside."

"No, I beg you, I'm better here," protested Fr Pavel in a clear, but quiet voice. "I often have these attacks ... it'll pass ... it's from the journey ..."

In answer to their insistent inquiries about the journey, Fyodor explained how the sick priest had been transported – part of the way in the "coffin-cart," like the others, partly on horseback; part of the way he had walked, slowly, with someone supporting him – and as for himself, his name was Fyodor Ukorov, and he had been the father's companion since as far back as Irkutsk, since they had left the prison.

"So good people still exist!" – murmured the Siberians of Vikhorevo, looking at Fyodor.

"I'm not good at all, but I was so sorry for him, he's touched me to the depths of my soul," said Fyodor, explaining in a rapid whisper, turning away from Fr Pavel, who had gone quiet again, "Look how we respected them before! Like our own fathers ... And now? Bad times have come on us, and it's worse for them ... they can't escape misfortune ... Is he coming to, did anyone hear him say anything?" And he moved towards Fr Pavel again.

"Where are you from, yourself? Bratsk?" – Fyodor was asked. "Where were you put inside? What did they do you for?"

"I'm from Omsk, from the transit prison," said Fyodor, unwillingly, "They slapped a political charge on me and sent me here for three years, what's the point of saying more? We'll have to get my invalid settled in somewhere as quickly as possible, there's not much to say about me."

Yevgraf Zakharov was now coming towards them; he had been in the forest and had not heard about the new arrivals at once; hurrying round the side of the administration building, he almost ran into the group of people surrounding Fr Pavel. It was explained to him that the sick man was a political exile, a priest from Leningrad, that they had hardly managed to get him here alive, and that he must be found a place quickly, so that he could rest, lie down and get warm.

"Well, what about it? You wanted some exiles? Will you take this one?" – asked Pimen Semyonov, joining the crowd.

"Yes, I'll have him," said the other, briskly.

Some roughly constructed stretchers were stacked in the entrance-hall of the administration building.

[...] Fr Pavel was put on one of these and carried to Zakharov's house, swaying gently from side to side because of the holes in the wide road. Fyodor walked ahead. When they got there, he touched Yevgraf's shoulder confidently:

"Don't separate us. sir," he begged, "I told the chairman that as well, he rang up ... The sick man can't get on without me. I bring him things and look after him, and keep things in order. And I can't do without him either. Allow me to stay, I'll work for you and serve you – just tell me how I can help. Tell me

what to do – and I'll get it done, whatever it is."

Yevgraf's gaze pierced through the young man.

"All right, you'll do," he decided, "Who knows what kind of person you are? But if you respect such men ... Only remember, no vodka drinking! Otherwise I'll chase you out at once and take on someone else, understand that ..."

The sick man was carried into the house, into the spacious hall on the ground floor, to the accompaniment of the shaggy watch-dog's yelps and barks. From there, Fr Pavel walked upstairs with the help of the mistress of the house and Fyodor; he was put in the side bedroom, a large, bright room, with a roomy lumber-room next to it; here he could sleep undisturbed, while a small door from the lumber-room led out into the hall. Tatyana Fyodorovna, Yevgraf's wife, helped Fr Pavel to get into the large bed with its mound of pillows and its homespun linen sheets, elegantly trimmed with lace. At this he began to apologise for having to use their linen for the time being, but assured them that things would soon arrive, parcels would be sent and then ... Tatyana dismissed his words with a wave of her hand and refused to listen. "Oh just be quiet, my dear man," she repeated, "they haven't deprived us of our linen as yet, and we can't drag it along with us to the next world anyway ... there'll be enough for us all ..."

Fr Pavel's health gradually worsens; but his influence on those around him increases. Yevgraf Zakharov experiences a change of heart and one day tells Fr Pavel all about his past; he confesses his sins and receives absolution. In the following passage Yevgraf Zakharov goes to see Fr Pavel.

[pp. 236-9] Yevgraf went upstairs with a heavy heart. He did not feel himself any more. It was only a short time ago that he had been freed from his burden of many years and had wept out his troubles by the priest's bed; he had resolved to control his fits of rage and indignation ... and now, all of a sudden ... What had he gained from quarrelling with the collective farmers? Had he not deserted peace and quiet for a mundane row, even bringing up the past? However, he was acquiring an inner peace, and he had resolved to preserve it and to curb his former bursts of anger. In this state of confusion, he entered the priest's room. Fr Pavel was not asleep and gave his visitor a keen, attentive glance. He had not regained his voice after the attack in the garden. He spoke in a whisper, but quite clearly, with a touch of hoarseness that had been distinctly audible when he was still quite well.

"Is it evening or night time? I'm a little mixed up ..." – and he turned his face towards Yevgraf. "Yevgraf Zakharich, you know, the day after tomorrow is Candlemas. I would like to fast. When Fyodor comes home today, we'll think about what would be proper ... And you join me too. Tomorrow, don't say no ... I shan't be getting up any more, but – please God – I'll live till the feast-day ... I don't want to leave you without support ... we'll be together ... for the last time ..."

Yevgraf did not answer at once, he was thinking about something.

"As God wills, father dear ... But what can we do? After all, it's not so long ago that ... Then I told you everything ... the whole truth ..."

He broke off in confusion. Fr Pavel understood what he was trying to say.

"I still have one gift, the Holy Sacrament " – he whispered, his voice trembling with joy. "I'll give it to Fedya too, one day soon ... soon ..."

He began to breathe rapidly and unevenly. Yevgraf bent over him, fearing another attack. But the sick man continued, after a fit of coughing:

"It's a miracle that I have it ... When we were on our way here, along the river, I met someone I knew ... also a priest, he recognised me and entrusted it to me. He gave it just to me, but I can't partake of it alone! There'll be enough for us all."

However, Yevgraf was now even more embarrassed:

"How can I take the last crumbs of the bread you need? It would last out; you could take it once or twice more, at least ..."

"I? Well, as it says, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine ... Praise be to God for everything!"

They decided that Yevgraf would

come up tomorrow, as soon as it was light. "I can't today, I'll make my confession tomorrow," he explained. "We were sitting over tea today, chattering unnecessarily, quarrelling because of those same shares."

"And do you think you'll be better tomorrow?" – asked the priest, smiling shrewdly.

"Not better, father, but all the same, a night removes you from your sins a little. Forgive me, for Christ's sake."

So began an unforgettable evening, when Yevgraf's whole character opened up and he left the cares and petty scandals of life behind for the peace of the faintly-lit attic and the sound of evening prayers and readings from the church calendar. Fyodor was reading them aloud, indistinctly but fervently, confusing the pronunciation of Church Slavonic words. It seemed to Yevgraf that he was listening to an angel. He fell on his knees and, repeating the prayer of the publican, bowed low to the ground from time to time.

"Pray for me, father," he begged the priest, on parting from him until the morning. "God knows I want to become a new man, like a child, but my old skin won't let me, everything goes wrong ..."

"Become a new man?" smiled Fr Pavel. "You are a new man; don't pay any attention to your old skin, it'll always bother you. But you just keep going – and you'll get there in the end, only be repentant ..."

Shortness of breath was making it difficult for him to whisper more.

"I want to ask you ... don't say no, Yevgraf Zakharich, ... don't leave my Fyodor, I've found a son on my difficult road. I never had any children of my own, and he came so suddenly into my life. He's not lazy, he works hard, he has a simple, child-like faith, but he needs supervision and looking after. You yourself understand what sort of life he's led so far? Now go ... Never fear, I'll live till the feast-day, please God!"

It was the evening before Candlemas. The lamp was burning low, crackling; the objects in the room were just distinguishable. Fyodor added oil to the lamp and adjusted the wick, then went away, promising to look in later that day. The master of the house was left alone with Fr Pavel. After Yevgraf had confessed and been absolved, he got up off his knees and kissed the Cross and the Gospels; then Fr Pavel asked him to sit down next to him. Both of them were silent for a long time: Yevgraf moved the glass of water closer and got ready to listen to the Communion prayer, – but instead, he heard the priest tell him, clearly and plainly, "Now I'm going to make my confession ... Hear me and receive my sins, for the sake of Christ crucified." "Father!" – begged Yevgraf, weeping, "What are you saying to me? Are you in your right mind, sir? You know my sins now, but how can I do this? I don't dare! Remember, my light, what I confessed to you, the things I've done! Ask Fedya, he's still a child ..."

"You are a man, a husband," insisted Fr Pavel in a firm whisper, using an authoritative tone no-one had imagined he possessed, "Don't desert me like this ... Even the minutes are numbered for me ... Take this on yourself as an act of obedience. Listen! I'll read a prayer. Then, when I've finished my confession, all you have to say is "God forgives you – and you too, forgive me, a sinner."

With heartfelt anguish and a sense of dread he had never experienced before, Yevgraf took in the secrets of the pastor's confession. He felt as if the floor were moving beneath his feet. His head bent down almost to his knees. At first he tried to stuff his fingers in his ears – but the priest gently touched his hand and he opened his ears to the words which reached him, as if from a distance. Fr Pavel went on whispering and whispering, easing not only his own burden, but also that of his hearer. How long did this last? Anyway, what had lain for years like a stone on the soul of the man hearing the confession, what had already fallen from his shoulders during his first act of repentance, breathed its last in these moments, releasing him completely, restoring to him his peace of mind and his ability to sleep, destroying his old nickname of "beast of prey."

Finally, the priest fell silent. Yevgraf was silent too, wiping his nose, eyes and cheeks with his sleeve.

"I think that's all," breathed the man confessing. "Now tell me how well I taught you ... God forgives you – and you too, forgive me, a sinner."

After these words, Fr Pavel immediately began to read the prayer before Communion.

Knowing that he is about to die, Fr Pavel celebrates the liturgy for the last time. The Unknown Homeland *ends with a description of Fr Pavel's death and burial.*

[pp. 240-1] After the severe attack of breathlessness in the courtyard, the priest's intense pains left him. He was visited by short-lived, mild pains, which were bearable and did not show. A dreamlike weakness, which lasted for hours, overcame him; this lasted till the evening of 13 February, when it left him for a short while and he regained some of his strength, so that he was able to prepare quite consciously for the day he had been long awaiting and on the morning of 14 February he celebrated the Holy Sacrament.

At ten o'clock precisely. Fyodor ran in, saw him sleeping and rejoiced: "Let him sleep, sleep cures everything! It can't be otherwise, he'll get over his illness from this day; he's had no attacks since the one in the courtyard!" With such cheerful thoughts, he was preparing to leave, but first he went up to the bed – and the sleeper opened his discoloured eyes for a moment, glanced at Fyodor and then closed them again.

"Remember, father, how you promised to come to the taiga with me in the spring? I can see you're better already!" – said the young man, his words falling into the unresponsive silence of the room. "Sleep cures everything, don't contradict me!"

At the door, he turned towards the bed again – he could not bring himself to leave.

"Your hands are cold again, as if they'd been out in the snow! Keep them under the blanket, until they warm up again. Well, I'm off now ..."

On his way out, he asked Tatyana to take up a hot iron to warm the father's feet.

At four o'clock, Tatyana went to look in on the sick man. He was asleep. He had an tranquil, peaceful expression on his face; she touched his feet, but the iron would not warm them – they were cold as far up as the knees.

It was getting dark, evening was approaching; it was the time when the late night service would have begun, if the tiny church had not been closed.

Downstairs, Tatyana had just taken the festive pies out of the oven. Then she began to prepare supper for the father – a bowl of oatmeal pudding with milk and a piece of pie – and called Fyodor, who had just come in, to take it upstairs. He was in time to hear the quiet sighs coming from the barely-moving lips and, leaning over the priest, he managed to catch his last whisper "... according to Thy word ..." He froze, seeing that Fr Pavel had just given a start and was now looking, not at him or at anything in particular, but somewhere else: his gaze was now fixed on a point beyond the wall, piercing through it.

[pp. 244-7] In the little garden behind the house, the father's "hermitage", as he had called it, where he had gone for his last walk, Fyodor and two exiles were finishing his coffin. There was a sharp smell of pine-wood shavings. His "abode" was deeply cut and made to measure – everyone felt the father would be comfortable in it. It was lined with fine linen; a muslin frill – handmade by Tatyana – was pinned to it with tiny nails, and on the lid was a gold braid cross. Right there in the courtyard, the coffin was sprinkled with holy water, which had been carefully preserved by the believers of Vikhorevo, and was carried upstairs. Father Pavel was lying there in his summer cassock, which he had received from home only a few days ago, under a new sheet, with his face open to the air. They sewed a gold cross onto the topsheet as well. In the country, unlike the town, there's not much fuss about funerals. The officials of the village soviet were informed that such and such an exile had died on such and such a date, then everyone went off to the cemetery to dig the grave, early in the morning on Candlemas day. The priest had already been placed in his coffin; people had brought all kinds of conifer branches – red fir, pine and cedar twigs, juniper – to lay on top of it. Everyone who knew how to read was reading the Gospel over the deceased. They couldn't bury him on Candlemas, as they would have had to carry him out in good time, before darkness fell, but

unprecedented discussions had arisen: one of the villagers had suggested that such a man should be buried to the accompaniment of church bells. Others agreed; they began to discuss whether they should restore to the belfry the bell which had been taken down two years ago and was now lying in the cellar of the Vikhorevo chapel. – "Couldn't we combine our forces for this, mates? It's not such a heavy bell, and we'll find the strength, as believers, – then we'll be able to ring out a farewell to the father, in the proper way, and we'll sing over his grave – and back in the homeland they'll sing the funeral service for him in his absence ... Chairman Pimen Semyonov won't come to the funeral – he'd feel uncomfortable, as a Party member, and the sound of the bell won't be heard as far as Bratsk; everyone's forgotten about our bell anyway, they wanted to take it for the ferry, but to this day it's still there ..."

"All right, get the bell!" – shouted Yevgraf, feeling himself to be the elder once more. "It's my decision, I've decided instead of the chairman, and I'll take the responsibility!" The exiles and villagers – about 30 people altogether – rushed towards the church, to help or look on. The bell was raised by all of them together. It still had all its chains, ropes and pegs beside it; they dragged it out of the cellar onto the raised porch, and from there to the belfry, with the help of the chains and ropes. But could they raise it without a song, on such an occasion? And what were they to sing? It wouldn't do to sing a folk song like "Dubinushka."

Someone decided to set an example to everyone:

"For we are now to receive the King of all! ..."

Everyone took up the chorus; the bell was now in place, it had been pulled up to the top, taken up to the massive hook and securely attached to it ...

In the frosty air, the song was still dying away:

"invisibly escorted ... by ...
the angels ..."

When they had finished raising the bell, Yevgraf shouted down:

"Now give it a ring, and we'll see what it sounds like!"

The sound they had not heard for so long throbbed through them and rang out over the countryside around them.

The father was carried out of the Zakharov's courtyard on the feast day of St Symeon the God Receiver, at around midday. A grave near the altar awaited him, with a young bird-cherry tree growing over it. The coffin was carried by Fyodor Yevgraf and the exiles who had arrived with the priest. The newly raised bell rang out monotonously and mournfully. His whole journey was made to the accompaniment of constant singing of "Holy God." They sang the litany, then the "Eternal memory" rang out; the coffin swayed on its linen and was lowered into the embrace of the eternally frozen ground; one after another, clods of frozen earth hurtled down on top of it, knocking dully against the roof of the coffin. People standing round wept. Taking off their hats, new men – Yevgraf Zakharov and Fyodor Ukorov – took their stand on the fresh mound.

People don't stand about for long in the frosts of Siberia! It was three kilometres there and back, they had to return to the village before twilight. Many headed for Yevgraf's house, as he had invited anyone sent by God to visit them for the wake. Tatyana was waiting for the guests at home, with pancakes and fruit jelly. "We're your grateful guests!" – answered those accompanying him, one by one, in response to this invitation.

Fyodor was the last to tear himself away from the grave. In the last two days he had wept out all his tears and was now overcome by a feeling of supernatural peace. It was a comfort to acknowledge that many other people had truly felt the loss of the father, the man he had held so dear, that traveller to an unknown land, like himself. "Remember, Fedya, work and pray, make yourself pray – prayer is the light of your soul – so said one of the saintly elders," – that was what the father had taught him. "You must become a new man, an honest man! Now you're not alone. The Lord will help you in all things." It was in such simple, clear terms that he had been instructed by this former academic, this bookish but always humble man. "I must do everything that the father prayed for!" – decided Fyodor, bending down to the arm of the cross

and giving it a filial kiss – and then he hurried home.

A light wind was whirling dust over the new grave-mound and flying up into the branches of the bird-cherry bush. The wind would grow stronger and wilder towards night, perhaps a snowstorm was blowing up? ...

So the story of the exiled pastor came to an end ... But though the storm blows over the new and old grave mounds, covering them with snow, though the snowstorm whirls over the distant cemetery, wrapping it in a mantle of white snow, though time goes by and years disappear, though no-one comes there any more and the small cross with its worn inscription falls off its base and collapses onto the ground ... still the bird-cherry tree will go on arraying itself anew in its wedding colours every spring, and the path of remembrance, prayer and veneration, which leads to such graves, will never be overgrown ...

Moldavian Catholics Appeal to Pope

Polish and German Roman Catholics living in the Moldavian SSR (a republic of the USSR) have appealed to the Pope for help. This appeal was probably written in early December 1977.

We, German and Polish Catholics living in the Moldavian SSR, affirm our deep devotion to the Roman Catholic Church and to You, as the Regent of Jesus Christ and the successor of the Apostle Peter.

However, as children of the great Catholic family, we appeal to you for help with sorrow in our hearts. When Soviet power was established in Moldavia, there were Catholic churches and priests in many towns and villages; the Soviet authorities have closed all Catholic churches, demolishing many and leaving only one chapel in the cemetery of Kishinev, the capital of the Moldavian SSR. There was a spacious, beautiful church in Kishinev, but it was closed and there is not enough room for people in the chapel; on Sundays they stand out on the street, often in the rain and cold, unable even to see the altar.

We have only one priest, Vladislav Zavalnyuk, who graduated from the Riga Theological Seminary in 1974. Although he is a young man (27 years old), he suffered from serious meningitis as a student, and as a result of this illness he gets severe headaches. He lives at the other end of town – about 7-8 km. from the cemetery where the chapel is. The authorities have not only refused to allow him to change to a flat nearer to the chapel, but also have recently confiscated the number plates and licence of his car. Now the priest has to waste over an hour getting to the church on public transport, while Catholics from all over Moldavia have come there and are waiting to confess; often they are unable to make their confession.

The priest, seeing the difficulties of his fellow-believers, tried to attend to their needs, especially by visiting the old and sick at their places of residence in answer to telegrams from Catholics. In many towns and villages, mostly where churches existed before, for example in Beltsy, Bendery, Tiraspol, Grigorovka, Rashkovo, Andryashevka, the Catholics meet together for prayer even daily. When the priest began to travel round from time to time, hearing confessions and holding Mass, the faith revived in Moldavia; not only old people, but children and young people began to attend prayer-meetings on Sundays and feast days, both when the priest was there and even when he was not. The authorities could not help noticing such a revival of faith. They began to persecute us Catholics and especially the priest, detaining him on the road, often fining him, and a priest summoned by a sick person needs five permits: from the doctor, the local authorities, the executive committee of the district *soviet*, the executive committee of the town *soviet* and the official for Religious Affairs, Vikonsky, to whom the priest must apply for permission to visit the sick person after obtaining all the other permits. None of the Catholics have succeeded in obtaining these permits, as each official sends them to another and so on endlessly; meanwhile people are dying without confession or spiritual aid. It would be impossible to list all