

Adventures of the Kniaz-Potemkin

True Story of the Revolt

Graphic Narrative by One of the Revolutionaries.

Specially Translated for the "New Zealand Graphic."

[Not long since the world was startled by the mutiny of the crew of the Kniaz Potemkin at Odessa, and how this great Russian battleship defied the entire Black Sea fleet for 10 days. Last week the *Graphic* informed us she had been once more seized by the revolutionaries, and in the course of a bombardment she was seriously damaged. The story of that first revolt makes gruesome reading, but a perusal of it enables one to get a wonderful insight into the awful events which are shaking the Russian Empire from St. Petersburg to the Crimea. The story, which has never before been published in English, came to light in this way. One of the quarter-masters of the Potemkin—a man of some education kept a diary of events through those awful fifteen days, and from Galatz in Roumania, where he went after the ship was given up, he sent his journal to "Je Sais Tout," an enterprising periodical published in Paris. The story has been expressly translated for the "New Zealand Graphic," and we give it below in full.]

First Day.

HORROR and Terror! It seems as though I had just had an awful dream, in which I took part in a frightful drama. But I know very well that I have not been dreaming; that I have not been at the theatre; that what I have just seen really happened, and that the story of what I have seen will to-morrow appear in the journals of the entire world and will become history! That which I have seen is so frightful that future generations will speak of it with fright. It is even more abominable than the assassination of Alexandra and Draga by their officers. The unlucky sovereigns of Serbia might perhaps have been able to run away into the street, and with luck might have escaped from the assassins. The officers of our battleship who have just been assassinated had not a single loophole of escape. They only had the choice between the sea and death! How did it happen? I have beaten my brow to try and unravel the thread of events, but I feel that there are many things which are hard to explain, and that in spite of everything there are things in this drama that I didn't understand, that I never will understand, and that nobody else will understand either.

It is, however, necessary that I should fix my ideas. If I don't write down this very day the story of what I have seen, perhaps to-morrow I won't be able to tell about them—and I wish to be able to do so. They might, perhaps, call me a witness, and I would have to swear to tell the whole truth. So in order that I won't make any mistakes later on, I am going to write the history of that bloody day that I have just lived through.

How the Great Revolt Started—The Rotten Meat.

This morning, as I was mending some of my clothes, I saw Kazlenko coming to me looking very troubled.

"Do you know what's the matter?" he asked me.

"No; what is it?"

"The meat in the soup is rotten. I saw it when they took it off the hooks in the butcher's shop at Odessa, and it was swarming with maggots. They are trying to practise economics on us again, or perhaps they are trying to push things as far as possible to see what we will let ourselves do. But it won't go off as easily as they think."

I made no response, but reflected. Meat full of maggots! Was it possible? They had already given us provisions that were not fresh and hard bread, but meat crawling with worms—that had never happened before!

However, the dinner hour sounded, and I found myself among my comrades with my soup basin, and felt a great agitation. Some of the sailors cried: "We won't eat this rotten meat," and threw the soup at their feet.

Others imitated them, and then taking our basins in our hands we emptied the contents out on the deck and cried: "It's a shame! If our father the Czar saw that soup he would have the officers punished!"

After that there was a deep silence—the second commandant, Gelerowsky, and a sub-lieutenant had just arrived on the scene.

"What is the matter?" asked the commandant. "Why is that soup thrown down on the deck?"

"The meat they made it with was rotten," said Kazlenko.

Gelerowsky did not reply. He betook himself to the galley and then went aft to the officers' mess-room.

I was very curious to know what he was going to say to the commandant, so I got as near as possible, and from my post I could see and hear perfectly. The second commandant sat down in his place, but ate nothing. Pensive he considered his brother officers, who were laughing and pouring out sparkling champagne into crystal glasses.

"Gelerowsky," said the commandant, "how is it you are not eating?"

"How can one eat and drink when there are on board this battleship eight hundred men who are not eating?"

All the officers turned towards Gelerowsky, who was pale and trembling, and one of them, a young man, striking the table with his champagne glass, cried: "If they don't eat let them drink—there's enough water in the Black Sea!"

At these words the glass was broken. Gelerowsky then quietly said: "If this continue, it is perhaps us who will drink it—the water of the Black Sea."

The commandant, Golikoff, then got up from the table, and, calling Pogoinetz, the sergeant-major, said to him, "Take your drum and sound the assembly on the bridge."

Pogoinetz did as he was told, and a moment later all the men were on deck, in rows before the officers.

I was next to Yakulenchouk, who said in my ear: "You will see. Things are going to get warm. They must not say too much, however."

The commandant raised his voice: "Why do you not eat the soup?"

There was no reply.

"Come, come, answer me. I wish to know why you don't eat it?" he reiterated.

Then Gelerowsky said: "They don't eat the soup because they fear the rotten meat."

There were signs of approbation in our ranks.

Then the commandant questioned Major Smirnoff: "Major," asked he, "is it true that the meat was rotten?"

The doctor, saluting, replied: "This meat is fresh and wholesome—in fact, I have never seen better."

Gelerowsky interrupted him: "I am extremely sorry to contradict you, but I myself saw this meat when they carried it to the galley, and it was crawling."

"Perhaps you saw it like that when it came from Odessa," said Smirnoff; "but since then I have had it salted and washed with sea water. It is now good and can be eaten."

The commandant raised his hand. "That is enough now," said he. "When the major has said the meat is good, it is good. Let those who wish to eat the soup step to the right and those who do not wish to eat it step to the left."

Slowly one by one we went to the commandant's right. Many marched on that side, regretfully, as though ashamed of submitting after what the major had dared to say; but the chief had commanded.

And what would happen to those who did not go to the right?

There were not more than about thirty men who had not moved.

"It is enough," said the chief, raising his arm. "Guard, surround those men."

The author of these notes makes us witnesses of horrible butchery.

Some of the sailors went to get their rifles and then surrounded our comrades.

The commandant had some large white sheets spread on the deck and called out, "These sailors are going to be shot, but their blood must not dirty the deck."

The thirty men were lined up and an armed picket arrived.

The commandant gave the word to fire but the sailors, grounding their arms, said, "We cannot kill our comrades."

Turning to Gelerowsky, the commandant said, "You see what your words have led to. You have backed up these men, and they won't obey me any more. You are the cause of this lack of discipline."

At these words Gelerowsky in his turn gave the order to fire.

At this instant a sergeant-major named Matioutschenko, his face livid, his eyes starting out of his head, and a gun in his hand, threw himself at Gelerowsky. "Ha, ha," said he; "you are going to shoot these men! There are not, then, enough corpses on the battlefields of Liaoyang and Mukden! There are not, then, enough dead at St. Petersburg and in Warsaw? You still wish to massacre innocent people! Ah, well! it is enough! We want to finish with the rule of atrocious barbarity. Long live free Russia! Sailors! instead of shooting at your brothers, you should shoot at your officers. You are in the majority; you will be the masters. Down with Tyranny!"

Gelerowsky was bewildered when he heard Matioutschenko, and breathlessly said to him, "Silence, you unfortunate; silence, or they will shoot you at once!" "It is you who is going to be shot," cried Matioutschenko, who loaded his rifle.

Gelerowsky then drew his revolver and shot at Matioutschenko, but missed him. A cry of pain resounded. It was Yakulenchouk who fell, wounded. Mad with pain, the wounded man threw himself at Gelerowsky, struck him on the forehead with the butt end of his rifle, and then threw himself into the sea.

Several of his comrades jumped overboard and saved him.

Whilst this was going on Matioutschenko had cried out to Gelerowsky, "Assassin! Assassin! Yakulenchouk was innocent. You shot at him because he was a partisan of the Revolution, and me also I am for the Revolution!"

Shouldering his gun, Matioutschenko took aim at Gelerowsky. The shot sped, another person fell to the deck, the blood bursting from his mouth!

It was done! The signal of the Revolution was given!

Pogoinetz threw his drum into the water, crying, "Long live the Revolution!"

Matioutschenko killed the captain of marines Niouppakouf, and Lieutenant Livintsof. Another sailor knocked down with a blow from a rifle an electrician officer named Thone.

At length Matioutschenko went to see the Commandant Golikoff, who had been made a prisoner in his cabin along with a lieutenant called Alexieff.

The commandant, an old man with a white head, fell on his knees and trembling implored Matioutschenko, "What are you going to do? Are you going to kill an old man like me? You don't know what you are doing. You are mad!"

"Commend your soul to God," replied

Matioutschenko. "In a second you will be dead."

The commandant got up and had not finishing making the sign of the Cross when he was shot dead.

Matioutschenko went up on deck again and called out, "The commandant is dead. We are now the masters!"

The bewildered sailors ran about asking one another questions, and some of them threw themselves overboard. Some of the officers, terrified, also went over the rails. When Matioutschenko saw them he cried, "They will go to Odessa and tell everything; let us kill them!"

Sailors from the ship began to fire on them, and the sea round about became red with blood.

Torpedo boat No. 267 made signals asking what was happening, and then got under weigh. Pogoinetz fired two blank cannon shots over her and made signals to her to advance.

When she came close to us they made her officers come on board and arrested them, also the officers of our own ship who had not been killed. An officer protested.

"If you wish to speak to me," said Matioutschenko, "take off your stripes and let us be equal."

Then suddenly that phrase gave him an idea, and he proceeded to solemnly degrade all the officers.

Among them there were three who tore their stripes off themselves and said to us: "We are heartily with you."

These three stayed on board, and we kept also Alexieff an officer whom we liked, and against his will we named him commandant of the ship. The other officers were put on a launch and sent to Odessa.

After that Matioutschenko had us all mustered again on the deck and said to us, "Now we are going to declare war against all Russians who are not for Liberty. The revolutionaries will follow us."

"Alas!" said Pogoinetz, "have you forgotten that the men of the Black Sea fleet have to revolt in the month of August. The order has not yet been given to all, and you have begun too early. They won't follow us."

"What is done, is done; we can't go backwards," said Matioutschenko, who started the refrain of the "Internationale":

"C'est la lutte finale,
L'Internationale,
Sera le genre humain!"

Some sailors accompanied the singer under their voices, which produced a most mournful effect.

Kazlenko arrived in the middle of the song, and simply said: "Yakulenchouk is dead!"

Matioutschenko replied: "Let him rest in peace—he is already avenged."

And that was the funeral oration of poor Yakulenchouk.

The Massacres Are Continued—A Ship Manned With Lunatics.

Fourth Day.

I have not been able to sleep. They make an infernal noise on the ship. But in spite of that I have been able to take repose? Yes, I perhaps would have been able to sleep if those frightful things had not happened!

The officers (the officers who were killed were taken by the fleet and thrown into the sea without a prayer!)

And the men have killed others still. First of all they killed Smirnoff, the major. This unfortunate man, perhaps the only guilty one in this affair, was thrown into a state of terror by the revolt, and went below to his cabin. With a gash of a dissecting knife he cut open his stomach. He was in his death rattle, and they heard him and twenty sailors went into his cabin. When they saw who it was they called out, "It's the man who caused all the trouble. Let us kill him!"

They kicked him about till he was dead, and then threw him overboard. Just as he struck the water I saw one of his arms detach itself from the rest of his body.

The chaplain was also killed. He was hiding in a cupboard when he was discovered by Matioutschenko, who shattered his face with a revolver shot. The blood spurted, and in an instant the chaplain's robe was all red.

It is abominable!