

The MAN WHO DIED *by* PROXY

- By Frank Gates -



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“IF a Negro could have turned white, Sam certainly would be a white man now,” said Colonel Harold Preston, a prominent attorney, talking to his friend, Judge Paul.

They had stolen away at the close of a strenuous trial for a little relaxation, and were fishing the mountain streams. They had taken Colonel Preston’s life-long servant, Sam, along with them. In turning a bend of the stream, they had suddenly come upon a large bear, and to make it all the more exciting, two little cubs were playing in the stream. None of the men had a gun or any means of protection, and Sam, who was in front turned so quickly that he knocked the Judge completely off his feet. Taking two or three jumps, he suddenly dropped and in his fright he buried his face in the leaves, giving a shriek of terror which

sounded through the woods like the piercing cry of a lost soul.

It was a toss-up as to whom this cry scared the most—Colonel Preston, the Judge, or the bears. With a fierce growl, the mother bear scampered off down the stream, followed by her cubs.

Although the shock had been rather sudden to the two men, they could not help but laugh at Sam’s fright, and it took the solemn pledge of both men that there was no danger before they could get him up on his feet again—Colonel Preston assuring him—“Why, Sam, that bear would have had to walk all over us to get anywhere near you.”

Sam replied, “Yas suh, Boss, but I’d just like to ask you a question: is I pale?”

The Colonel laughed. “I don’t think you are exactly pale, Sam, but I never saw

another human being with such terror on his face as you had when you saw that bear.”

Turning to Judge Paul, he asked, “Did you, Judge?”

A look of deep thought came into the face of Judge Paul, and after a few moments he replied, “Y-e-s, once, when I met *The Man Who Died, by Proxy*.” Then he went on: “Of course, you have heard of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the late Chief of the Secret Police of all Russia. He was known all over the world as the ‘*Soviet Monster*.’

“You know I was in the American Embassy a few years ago in Moscow, and in spite of all the rumors of terror the world was hearing of, none of them could compare with the horrors of this man’s atrocities. He was a man whose boast it was, never to have had a friend, and the power that he had over his fellow Soviet associates was greater than that of any dictator the world has ever known. The tortures which had long been banished from Europe were everywhere employed. In his service was a Chinese expert in the art (?) of torturing—some of his methods were unknown even in the Middle Ages.^[1]

“By the way, I have a clipping in my pocket re-copied from the Soviet newspapers in October, 1917. The number butchered in cold blood by the Revolutionary Tribunals at the request of Dzerzhinsky in five years was 1,572,718. To read the classifications of these victims is astounding. For instance, of Police Officers alone, 10,000; Doctors, 8,800; Professors and Teachers, 1,215; Land Owners, 12,950; Constabulary, 48,500; Intelligentsia and Middle class, 355,350; Peasants, 815,000; Army Officers, 54,000; Soldiers, 260,000. Not content with this, he had even caused to be put to death, 28 Bishops and 1,215 Priests. The article goes on to say that, although

Dzerzhinsky had been busy up to the time of his death, no figures of later massacres are available.

“When the news of Dzerzhinsky’s death a short time ago was printed in the newspapers, a sigh of relief came to us of the American Embassy, who had lived through those trying times. Here was a man who was reputed not to know the meaning of fear. His acquaintances knew him as one who feared neither God nor man.

“In the early part of my services in Moscow, I had the pleasure of meeting one of the finest men the world has ever produced—a man so gentle and kind, that in my entire four years at the Embassy, I never knew any one to speak evil of him. He was a Doctor Levervitch, and was conceded to be the leading Physician of Moscow, and the foremost authority in the entire medical world on poisons and their antidotes.

“Although Dr. Levervitch did not claim the friendship of Dzerzhinsky, he was the only man who ever received the confidence of this monster. If you remember, the cause of the mysterious death—that relieved down-trodden Russia of this fiend—was never explained.

“Dr. Levervitch’s description of Dzerzhinsky was very interesting, especially as nobody in Russia ever discussed him when he was alive. It was said that any man, woman or child who offended him, suddenly dropped out of existence.

FIVE months before Dzerzhinsky’s death, a man by the name of Burton had come into Moscow from South Africa. At that time it was not definitely known just what was his nationality, but the first time we ever heard of him was when he sent a messenger to the American Embassy from the Russian Prison, stating that he wished to have the protection of the American Government for a fair trial, as he had been born an American.

¹ NOTE—Following figures authentic, compiled from “PARIS GAULOIS.” —[Author.]

“I went over to the Prison to see him, and when I inquired what this man was charged with, I was horrified to learn that it was murder in the first degree. I was informed that the Chief of the Secret Police—Dzerzhinsky—had personally made the capture and on his testimony there seemed to be no doubt of Burton’s guilt.

“I was shown to his cell and told that I would be allowed as much time as I wished with him, but was also told that the evidence obtained by Dzerzhinsky was of such a nature that Burton’s innocence could absolutely not be proven.

“As I stepped into the cell, a strong, fine-looking man of about thirty years of age arose to meet me, and although his appearance showed every indication of perfect health, his eyes had a frightened, twitching movement—indicating a man laboring under a great strain. Burton assured me that a letter addressed to a General Harry Kingsley, Chief Engineer of the Port Flattery Construction Company, Port Flattery, South Africa, would bring proof of his American citizenship.

“It appeared by his statement that something terrible had happened in his life, something he did not wish to speak about. Anyway, he made me understand that it was nothing criminal, but of such importance to him that he wished to go back to America immediately. He told me he had fallen in with a young Frenchman who had assured him that relief from his TERROR could be found in Paris. He had gone there and had called upon Dr. Emile De La Pine, who had informed him that his examination proved his case to be hopeless; that he had only five more months to live, but had further informed him that there might be a possible chance for some relief if he could consult with Dr. Levervitch of Moscow, who was reputed to be an authority on such cases.

“Burton lost no time in hastening to Moscow, but in getting off the train upon his

arrival there, he found, to his consternation, that a thief had taken all of his money. He knew of but one man in Moscow to whom he could go—a banker by the name of Sergius Ivanoff. After a great deal of difficulty, he found the home of this man and was at last admitted to his library. Ivanoff greeted him with warm cordiality and insisted that he spend the night with him, stating that a client who was leaving the city, had left 50,000 rubles with him to be banked the next morning; and although he had notified Chief of Secret Police Dzerzhinsky, he told Burton that he would feel safer if he stayed in the house with him.

“Ivanoff then asked Burton if he was armed, and Burton produced a Colts revolver. At the back of the sumptuously furnished room, was a large bay window, reaching to the floor, and screened with heavy plush curtains. As Ivanoff turned to put the money in the safe, these curtains parted and a man with a sallow face, and the fierce, glaring eyes of a wolf stepped toward them. In each hand he held a revolver—covering both men. As Burton made a move for his gun, a cold, steely voice cried in English, “Hands up or you’re dead.” Then turning to Ivanoff, he said in Russian, thinking that Burton could not understand that language “This man,” indicating Burton, “is a thief and has come to steal your money; give it to me and I will take care of it until tomorrow.” As he finished speaking, he handed Ivanoff one of his cards. Then picking up Burton’s gun he put it in his own pocket. Ivanoff thanked him and assured him of his gratitude for the exposé, but told him that he would keep the money himself, in his safe until morning. With a snarl like the growl of a wolf, this fiend took from his pocket Burton’s revolver; seeing that it was loaded, he leveled it at Ivanoff, saying in English to make sure Burton would understand, ‘I am Dzerzhinsky, who takes what he wants, and I am not only going to take that money, but I am going to

hang your friend for your murder.’

“There was a flash and Ivanoff fell to the floor. Burton rushed to his friend’s side; the assassin stepped to the window and blew a whistle. To the two officers who entered, Dzerzhinsky said, ‘Arrest that man. His assistant escaped with the money. Take his gun with you; I was too late to save Ivanoff’s life.’

“BURTON then stated that he was taken to the prison and was refused permission to see anyone until he had stated that he was an American citizen.

“I assured him that I would get into communication with his friends in South Africa as soon as possible. I also informed him that under the conditions that existed in Russia at this time, and with the powerful influence that was against him, it would be almost impossible to save him, as I could not see where we could produce any evidence that would verify the story as he had told it to me. Dzerzhinsky’s word was law, and he would be sure to find some way to rush the trial through and a conviction was almost certain.

“On my return to the Embassy I wrote a letter to General Kingsley.

“Imagine my surprise three days later to hear that Burton had willingly allowed himself to be used for a blood transfusion. It appears that following my visit to Burton, one of the prison physicians had called to see him and had told him that for some unknown reason Dzerzhinsky seemed to be losing his strength and vitality, and this physician had told Dzerzhinsky that he would die unless he could have the infusion of blood from a strong and healthy man. This same physician offered Burton the proposition that if he would allow himself to be used for this blood transfusion, he would be given his liberty and a passport back to America; but we were informed the following day that Burton—in spite of his seeming good health—had died upon the

operation table. Knowing Dzerzhinsky as we did, no comments were made upon this strange occurrence.

“That night a cablegram arrived from South Africa stating that Burton was an American citizen and that a letter of explanation was following. Three days later, we received a registered letter, bearing the most alarming information concerning Burton. Being aware of the confidence reposed in Dr. Levervitch by Dzerzhinsky, we sent for Dr. Levervitch and read to him the contents of this letter we had just received.

“It appeared from the letter that three years ago Burton, who was a graduate of the Philadelphia College of Engineering, had been employed to assist in the construction of a railroad extending into the interior of South Africa, and had gradually worked himself into the confidence of General Kingsley, until he had become Chief Assistant Engineer.

“Five months ago he had taken his staff of Engineers and a pack train and had gone into the mountains. Ten days later, he had come back to Port Flattery, and stated that he had been bitten by a kajau, which is an almost unknown snake, never growing over six inches in length, and of a golden, copperish color. The habitation of this snake is absolutely unknown; only on rare occasions had it been found beneath the body of a fever patient which had been dead for some time. Burton, in turning over the body of a native which he had come across during the construction of the railroad, had been bitten by this snake and he had hastened back to Port Flattery for relief.

“The natives told him that the victim of this poison would not show any signs of having been poisoned until five months had elapsed, and then he would die a slow but horrible death—the fingers and toes turning black and dropping from the body. It was the native’s conviction that anyone infected by this poison would best hurl himself from a

cliff and by so doing end his misery and allow his soul to escape its torment.

“As far as the writer of this letter could find out, a cure had never been known, and it was in the hopes of finding some relief that Burton had gone to Paris, and he presumed had gone from there to see Dr. Levervitch in Moscow.

“We inquired of Dr. Levervitch if he had been present at the time of this blood transfusion operation, and he had informed us that he then had thought it was strange that he had not even been requested to be there; and he further stated that he could not understand how a physician could have been so careless as to allow Burton to die under such a minor operation.

“LOOKING back, it was not hard to imagine Burton’s feelings on being told to what use his blood transfusion was to be put; and knowing that even had he been given his liberty, he had only a short time to live, he had resolved that he would make this monster die by proxy—die for him. And he felt that he would at least be doing the world one last service by removing this fiend in human form—by sharing the death that had been intended for himself, with Dzerzhinsky.

“Dr. Levervitch requested that we allow him to send for Dzerzhinsky and inform him of the contents of the letter we had received.

“Even at any ordinary time a person would feel a chill creep over him when in the presence of this man, but that day everyone in the room seemed to feel an unaccountable horror come over them; Dr. Levervitch’s voice trembled, as he commenced to read General

Kingsley’s letter. I noticed the bored look of cold disinterest in Dzerzhinsky’s eyes as Dr. Levervitch began to read, but suddenly over that mask-like face of steel there dawned a look of terror such as I hope never to see again on human countenance. One of his hands was lying idly on the desk and as our eyes were riveted upon it, we noticed that the finger nails had commenced to turn black.

“With a sickening smile, Dzerzhinsky turned to Dr. Levervitch and said, ‘Well, I’m lucky that I have the greatest poison specialist in the world as my physician,’ and asking the Doctor to leave with him, he bade us all good morning. I saw him several times after that, but he always wore gloves, and with every step he took, he seemed to be in the greatest agony; his face, that at no time had ever shown happiness, now was a picture of abject terror and frozen fear. Three weeks from that time we heard of his sudden death.

“Two months ago, upon my visit to New York, as I was coming out of the dining-room of the Hotel Ritz, whom should I see but Dr. Levervitch. I had not seen him since that day at the American Embassy in Moscow. He informed me that he had found out the reason for not having been asked to be present at the blood transfusion operation of Burton and Dzerzhinsky; the prison physician had been instructed by Dzerzhinsky that Burton was *not to be allowed to leave the operation table alive*, and the fear of Dzerzhinsky was such that the physician dared not disobey his orders.

“I remarked, ‘Apparently you could not find a cure for Dzerzhinsky’s terrible malady,’ and as he looked me straight in the eye, he answered, ‘*I never tried.*’”