

which removed a number of the causes of friction, but it so happened that the war-makers were becoming active again just as the Church dispute flared up. Many of them, it is evident, look upon the present situation as a godsend for their cause. They persuade themselves that the groans of a persecuted Church and the cries of exiled nuns can be exploited, in Protestant America, on behalf of their crusade, which is directed toward the mineral riches of Mexico. But this persuasion of theirs means horrible perplexity for President Coolidge, who is under bombardment from every side. The Catholics of the United States number between eighteen and twenty millions. Their organizations are wealthy and powerful. They include certain large bodies of voters — one of them, indeed, surpassing all other sections of the American community in political effectiveness — which cannot be ignored by any American politician or by the President. These at the moment are demanding,

with one voice, that the Washington Government should dispatch a ringing remonstrance to the President of Mexico upon his impious policy against the Church. Mr. Coolidge is the elected head of a nation which contains five or six Protestants to every Catholic. He presides over a Government which embodies in its entirety the doctrine of the secular State. Accordingly, it may be thought, the strictest neutrality in respect of Mexico is imposed upon him — even if we set aside the militant Protestant societies, the great force of old-fashioned anti-Romanism prevailing in the Southern and Western States, and that grotesque terrorism which is the monopoly of the Ku Klux Klan. President Coolidge, we must assume, will continue to sit tight, steadily refusing to be drawn into the vortex of ecclesiastical war. But it cannot be denied that the problem created for him by the Church in Mexico is immeasurably more difficult than any with which he has so far been called upon to grapple

FELIX DZERZHINSKII¹

BY VALENTIN SPERANSKII

[THE death of Felix Dzerzhinskii, the father of the Russian Cheka, and perhaps the most fanatical of Lenin's disciples, has called forth in the European press many character studies of this strange personage. None, we believe, is more illuminating than the brief account that follows of what we should call in America his high-school years.]

¹ From *Dni* (Paris Conservative-Socialist daily), August 1.

FIVE years ago, when I chanced to see Felix Dzerzhinskii pass close by, I at once recognized my old schoolmate in the uncanny man with glassy eyes, sunken cheeks, darkish, waxen forehead, and Mephisto beard.

Although exactly my own age, Felix was one grade behind me at the Vilna gymnasium. I can clearly picture him even now as a twelve-year-old boy, as lively as quicksilver, and

almost epileptically nervous. His pale, anæmic face was at times convulsed by a grimace, and a satanic sparkle often glittered in his light-green eyes. His shrill voice quivered with emotion. An irrepressible lad, Felix was constantly dashing through the corridors like a hurricane, noisy, mischievous, impertinent. But even then one was conscious of a broken chord in the gamut of this adolescent youth who possessed none of the genuine childish love and joy of life.

Cazimir Dzerzhinskii, Felix's elder brother, was my classmate. He was a very kindly, sympathetic boy, who behaved well in school, and always secured reasonably good marks in spite of his desperate stammering. He told me many interesting things about Felix, who, it seems, was a spoiled child at home, whose mischief and disobedience were always overlooked.

The Dzerzhinskii family belonged to the Polish nationalist nobility, and lived in some remote provincial corner. They must have been quite well off, to judge by the fact that the several sons who attended school in Vilna were all placed in the more expensive boarding houses. The Dzerzhinskii brothers never suffered proletarian privations in their early years. They were young, well-groomed noblemen, by no means spendthrifts, but utterly unfamiliar with the poverty of the poorest boys in our school, some of whom were once tempted by hunger to steal coins from the alms box in the Roman Catholic chapel of the Ostrobroma Mother of God. The boys were grievously underfed in the public-school pension, and were caught in the act of slipping a glue-covered stick into the slot of the box. This was not only theft, but sacrilege, and Vilna public opinion was thoroughly aroused. Felix Dzerzhinskii confidently predicted, however, that

the young criminals would be acquitted, and that the school authorities would be horribly disgraced.

'Never mind, never mind,' he repeated with jerky movements of his hands. 'They'll get nothing at all, and come out of the water dry. And the old ape' — he meant the school superintendent — 'will get a good shake-up in St. Petersburg if it comes out during the trial that he sold rotten potatoes from his farms to the school pension, with the consent of its manager. Grand mix-up! Magnificent scandal!'

He proved a true prophet. A few months later the Vilna Courthouse was crowded with people eager to listen to the sensational trial of the luckless young students. We, who were their schoolmates, were consumed with curiosity; but no pupils except the defendants were admitted. We learned from the newspaper next morning, however, that the attorney for the defense, after having the members of the school's faculty removed from the jury, had made a vigorous, convincing plea, and had succeeded in getting the youthful offenders acquitted. Felix Dzerzhinskii danced up and down triumphantly with a number of the *Vilna Messenger* in his hand, and explained to the crowd of lower-grade pupils: —

'It's all right sometimes to take what you need — only you mustn't get caught. These simpletons were thoroughbred fools, they were — even if they did sail through the trial as smoothly as a drowned man. Our Frenchman is perfectly right when he tells us that we may copy our examination papers as long as we don't get caught. These sorry swindlers ought to have placed a lookout outside the chapel so that the beadle could n't surprise them. Then, too, they might have offered him a tip at the right moment. However, all's well that ends well.

They'll be cleverer next time; and they won't bother with petty business like fishing coppers out of alms boxes — they'll find something that will pay better. . . .

At that time I thought Felix Dzerzhinskii was simply joking. I well remember how a tall, blonde pupil of the graduating class listened to this outburst with a smile of good-natured contempt. It was Sverubovich — now the famous Moscow Art Theatre artist Kachalov. Looking down at the small, writhing Dzerzhinskii, he waited patiently to the end, and then, catching the breathless lad's eyes, shook his head reproachfully. I confess with shame that I only laughed at Felix's wild talk.

Neither did I reflect much at the time upon another incident of our schooldays. One day Felix asked me hurriedly in the corridor: —

'Speranskii, have you passed your algebra examination?'

'I think so.'

'If you're not sure, I can steal your paper from Rodkevich' (the teacher of mathematics in whose house Dzerzhinskii lived) 'and let you correct it from the textbook. Or, better still, you write it out anew, guaranteed correct, and I'll sneak into his study sometime when the lady is out and substitute it for the paper you wrote in class.'

'But, Dzerzhinskii — what are you talking about? Could you — ' I protested.

'What are you afraid of? I'm doing you a favor. But then, if you don't want to, you don't have to do it — keep your innocence.'

Hatred for Russia began to embitter young Dzerzhinskii's heart from his early youth. Even as a boy, I could not help observing with anxious amazement his growing cynicism and hostility to all established authority. To be sure,

this attitude was not altogether without justification. The laws relating to public education in our border provinces were about as bad as they could be. Sergievskii, who had been district superintendent of public instruction for twenty-nine years, was a creature of the detestable Minister of Education Tolstoi, and relentlessly enforced his clerical and reactionary regulations. Poles and Jews were tolerated in schools only on sufferance. Since the Polish insurrection of 1864 a persistent policy of obliterating whatever related to that nationality had been followed. We were constantly spied upon and repressed in every way. The artist Kachalov, whom I have just mentioned, said to me long afterward that although as a Russian he belonged to the dominant nationality, and was a member of the privileged Orthodox Church, he shuddered at the memory of the years he spent at the Vilna gymnasium.

We were compelled to attend every one of the long Orthodox Church services in celebration of the so-called 'Tsar's holidays' — that is, birthdays and saints' days of the Tsar and the principal members of his family. At least Protestants and Roman Catholics had to be present, although Jews and Mohammedans were allowed to remain away. I recall particularly one such service. Our choir sang beautifully; our priest, who was a gifted pulpit orator, officiated; but nothing in the magnificent Russian cathedral engaged the attention of Felix Dzerzhinskii, who stood directly in front of me and fidgeted from the beginning of the service. Finally he whispered to me with great nervousness: —

'The devil! This new uniform pinches me under the arms, my necktie creeps up, my feet are numb — how soon can we go home?'

I answered him rather irreverently:

'Pray to God that the services may be over quickly.'

'What language must I use if I want to speak to your God? You know, in our own churches you do not permit even prayer books in Polish!' he said with a satanic sneer.

I knew nothing of the prohibition of Polish prayer books, and the cruel humiliation that this must be for my companion. So I felt quite embarrassed. All I could say was:—

'Keep quiet and don't talk. The inspector might see us.'

'I will. I will stand still and not talk. For a while! For a while!' he concluded in a threatening tone.

Little did I imagine then that this youth with a nightmare soul was fated to inflict the horrors of the Inquisition upon the guiltless Russian people, who were doomed to expiate with their own blood and suffering every one of the old Government's suicidal mistakes.

A JOURNEY IN ABYSSINIA. I¹

BY JEAN D'ESME

OUR steamer drops anchor in front of a low line of coast. As we gaze shoreward the details of the scene define themselves in the brightening dawn. A jetty stretches toward us across the surface of the water. Behind it a cluster of trees forms a dark spot in the monotony of the plain. Beyond, white houses dot the background. Nothing else is visible for thirty leagues, except far away toward the west, where the eye catches a bluish rectangle—the gardens of Ambouli. Sand, whitewashed walls, a glare of morning sunlight from a hot, cloudless sky—that is Jibuti, the capital of French Somaliland, and the only port of access to the Ethiopian Empire.

A strange city it is — a victory over sand, sea, aridity, climate, and hostile natives. Little by little its broad avenues, trim plazas, tennis courts, cafés, shops, automobiles, telephones, rail-

¹ From *L'Écho de Paris* (Clerical daily), July 27, August 1, August 3

way, and modern harbor have been created virtually out of nothing. For years France's effort to form a settlement here was the joke of the boulevards. Recall that famous story of the green-painted zinc palm trees that the Jibuti colonists were said to have erected in order to have at least a semblance of shade and verdure in their desolate desert hole.

At the wharf we engage an extraordinary survival of a victoria, with zigzag wheels, patched with pieces of barrel hoops, and drawn by a spectre of a horse in a harness half leather and half rope. This rickety and delapidated vehicle conveys us to Menelik Square, which is surrounded by shops and arcades where yawning merchants stand in the doorways inviting those who pass to enter. Several of our fellow passengers already sit at the tables in front of the cafés, besieged by peddlers. These hucksters are real ambulatory bazaars, ready to sell you anything, and a veri-