

# Memoirs of Mendel Beilis

## Victim of Russian Persecution Writes His Own Story for The Bee Readers

### PART V.

A warder came and took away my prison clothes, and brought me the old blue suit which I was wearing at the time of my arrest, and which I had not seen for two years.

"Make yourself comfortable," said the superintendent, while I was dressing, "you have nothing to worry about. The truth will soon be told now."

When I heard him say this in quite a kind voice I could scarcely believe my ears. Was this the man who had all along treated me so shamefully?

He evidently had an idea of what was passing through my mind—I suppose I must have looked astonished, for he made haste to add, in an apologetic tone:

"I see by the newspapers that there is no evidence against you, and that you will be soon set free. When that time comes I don't want you to think unkindly of us. Remember, in prison we have to do many things we don't like."

I thanked him and left the cell with my guard.

Before leaving prison, two of the policemen took hold of me and took off my clothes until I was naked. Then they began to punch me and pinch me all over until I cried from pain. One of them put his fist in my mouth, and, taking hold of my tongue, twisted it until he nearly tore it from the roots. This was to make sure that I had no poison in my mouth.

I nearly fainted with pain. They roared with laughter. This treatment went on every day during my trial. Having redressed myself, I was told to follow my guard, and after a walk along some corridors, I found myself at the prison entrance, where a prison van was drawn up. As I was getting into the van I caught one glimpse of the beautiful sky, which I had not seen for so many weary months. The van was surrounded by soldiers in the courtyard of the prison, and when the great doors opened I could see from the small grating many more soldiers, and hundreds of police and gendarmes pushing back a great crowd who tried to make their way to the van.

There seemed to be more women than men in the crowd. Most of them were girl students. There must have been many thousands in all. Many waved handkerchiefs, and their hats, and I heard them shouting my name. I was overjoyed to find that I had so many friends outside, and my heart became much lighter.

All the way to the court the streets were thronged, and I could see costars driving the people back with whips before we arrived. Although I had lived in Kiev for many years, this was the first time I had seen the building.

As we entered the court, the thought came into my mind, "I must not fear. God will help me. He will show them the truth. He will not leave me alone in this hour." And it was this thought that kept me up during the terrible time of my trial, which now seems to me like a nightmare.

Going up the stairs I met several students, with their "Black Hundred" badges on their coats. They stood in our way, and would not allow us to pass for the moment.

"Wait a moment," they cried, "you dirty Jew! They will show you here how to kill our Christian children!" I was placed in a cell in which prisoners awaiting trial were kept. It was very small, with a wooden bench on one side. Four soldiers guarded me with loaded rifles. It seemed hours before I heard a voice calling:

"Bring in the prisoner!" The four soldiers, with naked swords, surrounded me, and took me into court, telling me to occupy the tiny dock, in which for thirty-five days, and sometimes nights, I was to remain.

My eyes first fell on the four judges, all of whom were dressed in black, while the president, in addition, wore his chain of office. At the back of the judges, another forty or fifty officials filled every available chair, and many were standing. Among these I recognized all the prosecutors who had come to see me, the governor of Kiev, and the chief gendarmes, who had me arrested, and during my imprisonment had frequently questioned me.

Presently my eyes wandered around the body of the court room, where I noticed a number of fashionably dressed women I wondered what they had come for. All eyes were turned on me, and I felt



A Prisoner Rushed to Court by Cossacks. A Sketch by Mr. John Charlton, the Distinguished English Illustrator, Drawn in Russia, and Showing the Brutal Methods of the Russian Police with Their Prisoners.—Beilis Tells How These Same Cossacks Whipped the People to Make Way for Him When Carried Away for Trial.

very nervous. I saw a great number of lawyers walk in, and a warder told me they were all against me. This made me very much afraid. But soon afterward I saw my lawyers come into court, and my confidence came back.

It seemed to me that there was a quarrel between the lawyers right at the start, as to where they should sit. I think mine must have won, because they laughed and looked very happy. One of them beckoned to me, and told me to take a seat at the other end of the dock, just against them.

I shall never forget my feelings when I saw the jury come in. I had hoped to find them of the better class. It seemed to me that the ordinary moujik could not possibly understand the complicated questions I had been told were to come up. When I saw that ten of them were peasants, and looked at them sitting in their rough dress and long hair, my hopes again began to fade.

Just in front of me I noticed a gentleman in the uniform of a general, his chest being nearly covered with medals. He reminded me very much of my old colonel. My thoughts went back to the days in the army, and I wished heartily that I was living them over again.

I had another look at the general. I could not see his face, but I at once decided that so important a man must be against me. But when he looked around and I saw his countenance I thought immediately that this must be a very good man, and I was sure that he would stand up for me. I found afterward that it was Dr. Pavlov, the czar's own physician.

He turned out to be my most powerful friend in court. His testimony proved that a man like myself, with no medical knowledge, could not possibly have killed the unfortunate boy, inflicting such extraordinary wounds. It was discovered later that the man whom many suspected

of having committed the murder was accustomed to slaughtering animals. At last the court seemed to settle down, and I heard the president's voice saying in Russian:

"Beilis, how old are you?" In a trembling voice, which scarcely seemed to be my own, I told him. "Are you a Jew?"

"Yes, your excellency," I replied. Other questions followed, the last one being devoted to finding out whether I had confidence in my lawyers, which, of course, I had. Then followed the reading of the indictment, which lasted three days. I remember that my name was only mentioned once, and then, only on the last page.

At last, the evidence started. I heard the mother of Yuschinsky, Prichodko, tell how her boy left home and never returned. Then Vera Cheberiak was called. I could not help feeling nervous and excited. Although I did not know all that she was going to say, yet, from what the prosecutor had told me while I was in prison, I knew her story was supposed to be right against me.

She began by telling the judges and jury that the boy, who would have been an important witness if he had not died under suspicious circumstances, had been playing with his little friend Yuschinsky, near the brick works.

Suddenly, she said, a Jew with a black beard rushed out and seized her boy, dragging him into the grounds of Zaitseff's brick works, and Yuschinsky was never seen alive again. I knew this to be a pack of lies, but all the same I could see, watching the faces of the jury men closely as I did, that her story had made a deep impression upon them. Everyone in court was excited, which increased when she was confronted with the police officer who was present when her son died.

doctors feared for his life. At this moment the mother appeared and insisted on taking him home. The doctors protested, but she insisted.

"Because he was to be such an important witness, the police did not let him out of sight, and one of them accompanied the pair home. Shortly after their arrival the boy became so bad that his death was feared. The poor boy himself realized this, and called for a priest.

"Father! Father!" he cried, "come quickly. I want to make a confession." The priest came, but the woman stepping between them. Excitedly she put her hands to her mouth and signalled the boy not to speak.

"Jenia! Jenia!" she screamed, "tell the police officer that I am innocent of this murder. Tell them that I know nothing about it!" But the boy, in a soft, heartbroken voice, said:

"No, mother, I cannot, I cannot. Leave me alone," and, addressing himself to the police, in his gentle voice he called out:

"Father! Father! Come, come quickly! I must tell you the truth!" He never had the chance. Cheberiak rushed at him, pushing aside the priest and police officer, and seized him in her arms. She caught him up to her, showed kisses upon his mouth, so that he could not speak, and thus the boy died. I have often wondered what this boy would have said had he been allowed to speak.

While my counsel, Mr. Maklakow, brother of the minister of the interior, was describing this dreadful incident, I felt fainting to the floor. As for the greater part of the trial, I do not know even now what it was all about. For days many important people came and gave evidence about the ritual practice, but I understood nothing of what they said. I used to ask one of my lawyers whether they were for or against



A Massacre of Revolutionists by Russian Soldiers. Men Belonging to the "Black Hundred," the Anti-Jewish Organization Described by Beilis, Are Picked Out for Such Outrages and Are Trained to Kill as Many Jews as Possible.

18th of March, 1911, the day before the murder, the police had arrested a gang of thieves with whom Cheberiak was known to have been associated.

Mr. Broushkovsky was able to prove that two or three days before this there had been a quarrel between Yuschinsky and the children of Cheberiak, and the former threatened to tell the police about the woman Cheberiak and the gang of thieves. And, in Mr. Broushkovsky's opinion, there was no doubt that this led to the boy's murder by the gang, they evidently being afraid of his talking.

Many believe, when Cheberiak's son lay dying and begged to make his confession, it was the truth about the murder which he wished to tell.

With all the facts that eventually came into his possession, Mr. Broushkovsky was able to reconstruct the scene of the murder. He says that Yuschinsky was enticed to Cheberiak's house, where the assassins, the remaining members of the gang, Ivan Latschov, Peter Singavevsky and Boris Roudinsky were awaiting him. The boy was dragged to a small bedroom by the men. Cheberiak and another woman kept watch. Yuschinsky was gagged—it must have been during this time that the screams were heard—and speech was one long attack on the heads of the moujiks of the jury, men with less education than myself.

I wondered whether he could believe all he was saying. Throughout, he did nothing but insist that Jews used Christian blood, and he even went when he said this. He looked to me like a man acting his part. He said scarcely a word about the facts of the murder. The entire speech was one long attack on the heads of the moujiks of the jury, men with less education than myself.

I did not know how to keep still during his speech. I felt like appealing to the jury, men like myself, not to listen to such lies. But I managed to keep calm. The finish of his speech made me cry with shame, as he said:

"Jurymen, there is no other murderer than Beilis. He is the man who dragged the unfortunate boy to his doom! You are real Russians! I leave it to you to give a real Russian verdict." I could not sit quite still under this. I jumped up and shouted:

"God strike me dead if I have done this!" Mendel Beilis will conclude his story next Sunday.

were released and went straight to Cheberiak. They told her that Yuschinsky was not, after all, the cause of their arrest. This statement seemed to make Cheberiak more agitated still. She left the house and went to a small lodging house until a day later the body was removed to the brick works, whither it was taken by a certain Vitka Brit, and was discovered by the police on March 21.

On the 21st the mother received an anonymous letter signed "Christian," and stamped Kiev-Cherson. The letter was dated March 20. It was written as a letter of sympathy to the unfortunate woman, and denounced the crime as a ritual murder committed by Jews. And here is the strange fact. Later, one of the witnesses at my trial received a letter from Cheberiak, written for her by Mandelavsky, one of the gang. The handwriting was that of the letter received by Yuschinsky's mother on this occasion.

The sensation caused by Bronshkovsky's story when related in court can be imagined. I stood amazed as such a tale of villainy. Poor Mr. Broushkovsky! He also suffered on my account!

It seems that when I had been in prison only a few months he laid these facts before the prosecutor, Fenenko, and the other authorities. But they refused to take notice of them or investigate further. Since I have been released he has been sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment on a charge of lese majeste. It appears that he omitted to take off his hat while the national anthem was being played. On such an obviously trumped-up charge—tried without a jury—he was condemned for what he did for me.

Mr. Krasovsky, the ex-detective who aided him, suffered also. First of all he was dismissed from his post for not conducting the inquiries on the anti-Semitic lines demanded by the authorities. The proceedings were commenced against him for spreading "libels" when he published the above disclosures. Moreover, many newspapers were confiscated for stating that my case needed revision.

Bearing these facts in mind, it is easy to imagine how became of the evidence of Singavevsky, Roudinsky and Cheberiak—the witnesses as to fact against me—when my counsel began to question them. Their story toppled like a house of cards. I knew that if a fair verdict was given I must be acquitted and my heavy burden seemed to fade into the air.

All the hopes that I had formed fell to nothing while Prosecutor Wipper was making his address to the jury. I could understand every word he said. Evidently he did not mean to speak above the heads of the moujiks of the jury, men with less education than myself.

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