



THE BLACK BOX TREASURES

A Bulletproof Resurrectionist - The Beginnings (#20)

This is a story about a 9-nine year boy who was dreaming of being a Resurrectionist. A story of a Brother who although working all day in the sacristy, was able to find time to work on his "invention". A story of a religious who not knowing any language except Polish met with many ambassadors and rulers. A story of an inventor who travelled all around Europe to find sponsors for his project. It is a story about fear, lack of money, theft but also about hope, strong faith and the fight for protection of the invention. It is a fascinating story of Br. Casimir Zeglen, the inventor of the bulletproof vest by a simple sacristan at St. Stanislaw Kostka Parish in Chicago. It is a story of a man about whom the Chicago newsletters' headlines reported: "To Be Tried on Human Target - Zeglen's Bullet-Proof Cloth Saved a Dog's Life" (*The Evening Star*, Washington, July 3, 1897), "Risks His Life to Prove His Invention" (*The Saint Paul Globe*, October 4, 1897), "Life of Russian Prince Saved by Such Garment" and "Crowned Heads of Europe Wear Them on State Occasions" (*The Sunday Chronicle Chicago*, August 24, 1902).

This 20th edition of the Black Box Treasurers is the first part of a miniseries about Br. Casimir Zeglen, C.R. and the "Zeglen Bullet Proof Cloth Company". In the Roman Archives we have Zeglen's letters (64), some documents regarding his religious life and a few pieces from newsletters from 19th/20th centuries. In this series I would like to, (based on these documents,) share with you Br. Casimir's fascinating story.

Casimir Zeglen was born in 1869 in Kaczanowka (today Ukraine). He entered the Congregation probably in 1888 at 19 years of age and began his religious formation in the house in Lviv under Fr. Paul Smolikowski, C.R. as the superior. Being afraid of military enlistment he wrote a letter to General Przewlocki asking for a transfer to "another religious house abroad" (ACRR 38761). The superior sent him to Rome where on April 6, 1890 he professed his religious vows in the Congregation of the Resurrection (ACRR 7000/174). A few months later with General Przewlocki he sailed to the States. They landed in New York on June 16, 1890 where they were greeted by Fr. Gordon (Przewlocki W., Diary III, 3, ACRR 2964). From there the General went to visit the Resurrectionists ministering in Canada and our Brother probably went with Fr. Gordon to Chicago. It is in Chicago where Zeglen's "American Dream" began...

Today I would like to show the first letter of Br. Zeglen which we have in the Archives (ACRR 38761). He writes to general Valerian Przewlocki to express his fear regarding the military enlistment. It is funny that someone who invented the bulletproof vest was so afraid of being a soldier...

Lwów Dnia 29 Styчня ro. 1890

ARCHIVUM C. R.

No. 38761

Najprzywielebniejszy Ojciec Generale

Wdaję się do ojca z wielkim smutkiem
i zalem względym wojskowosci bo
teraz niezadługo mam stawać do

Asyntyrunku i obawa mnie bierze
zeby nieasyntyrowali do wojska mnie
i Trochę i błagam na Miłosci

Boga zeby mnie ojciec przeniósł do
innego domu zagranicy gdy bym
wyjechał to bym już niestawał do
Asyntyrunku i takim sposobem
będąc wolnym od wojskowosci

Ale zaxarem niewolnym wracać
do Kraju aż po 36 latach wieku życia
i proszę ojca niespowodu jasię boję
wojska ale zetań trzeba cierpieć
Duro od wszystkich. ale ja nadem
boleje zetań ^{natterm} cierpieć wielki

Jakżeż mnie się nie smucić kiedy
widzę przed sobą wielki niebezpieczeńst
wo duszy i mnie nie idzie o cierpienie
ciała ale o cierpienie duszy i zbawienie
J. tak czołując się powstanym do życia
doskonalego czyli zakonnego jeszcze
w życiu dziecięcym bo zaledwie
mniałem lat 9 a już pociąg mniałem
iść się na służbę Bożą i jeszcze
wówczas obratem sobie zgromadze
nie Zmartwychwstania Pańskiego
i od tego czasu byłem w tym zgro
madzeniu z sercem i myślami
i Trągotem jak najprędzej wstąpić
do zgromadzenia z ciałem i dozna
i ogromne cierpienia ponosiłem
Duchowy bo chciał wabił mnie
do siebie a pan Bóg rządził a
chciałem być z nim

Tjuz postanowiłem raz naraz wstąpić
do zgromadzenia mając lat 18. i w ten
czas jeszcze wiele cierpienia ponosiłem
bo ojciec chciał żebyś przynim
został w domu ale ja się wziął całą
gorliwością do dzieła i wszelkie
trudy pokonałem świata
I teraz widzę że niebezpieczeństwo
mnie grozi gwałtowny i wielki
i postanowiłem Prosić ojca
o Przeniesienie mnie gdzie indziej
do innego domu naszego
zagranicę gdzie wola Ojca jest
i postanowiłem nigdy nie wystąpić
ze zgromadzenia z pomocą Bożą
i jest mnie bardzo bolesnie
że świat na mnie swe Siła
na stawia a temi Siłami jest
wojako

Bo chto pojdzie do wojaka to
już wniem gorliwosc zakonna
ustanie i czasem z stracie powołania
i Tego ja się boję bo czasem
do tego mozy przyjsc ze stać się
może niewiernikiem wiary sw.
i może zastuzyc na piekło
inaczej najwięcej mam strach
bo wiem jaki szewick jest skłomny
do wszytkiego.

Prosze i Błagam i zaklinam
na miłość Boga raka ojce
radość uczynić prośbom moim
~~Abis~~ a Bóg miłosierny
wiele łask zesle tobie ku potrzebom
twoim
Unixony Stuga
Lajek Kazimierz Tegler
i Gondrawiam ojca Perdecznie
i zyczę woszelkiej Pomysłności

(Casimir Zeglen., C.R., Letter to Valerian Przewlocki, C.R., dated January 29, 1890, ACRR 38761)

Lviv, January 29, 1890

Very Reverend Father General,

I write to you, Father, with great sadness caused by the fact that I was asked to enlist in the military. So I ask and beg you, for God's sake, to send me to another religious house abroad. If sent I will be avoiding entering the military and I will be free from military duty. I'm aware that in so doing I will not be able to come back to the country until I am 36 years old. So I beg you, not because I fear being in the military but because, once there, I will be suffering a lot by everyone; I'm also afraid of the great corruption there.

What great sadness comes over me when I see such big danger for my soul. I'm not talking about the suffering of my body but of my soul and I worry about my salvation.

I have felt the call to religious life since I was 9 years old. Since that time I had a strong desire to serve God in the Congregation of the Resurrection and since that time I had this Congregation in my thoughts and with my heart hoping to enter the community as soon as possible. I was undergoing great spiritual anxiety because the Devil tempted to draw me to itself but God asked me to follow only Him.

So when I decided, once and for all, to join the Congregation I was 18 years old. Also at that time I suffered greatly because my father wanted me to stay at home with him but I decided with all my energy to reach my goal and I overcame all the worldly obstacles.

But now I see that great danger is coming at me so I decided to ask you, Father, that you send me, according to your will, to another house abroad. I decided with God's help to never leave the Congregation. I suffer much from the world wanting to trap me in its jaws and that trap is the military.

Whoever joins the military, certainly will lose his religious zeal and, with time, he will also lose his religious vocation and I'm afraid of that. Moreover, it happens that a person may become an unbeliever and doing so he will go to the hell. This is my greatest fear because I know that a human being is able to do the worst.

So I ask, I beg and I implore you, for God's sake, to do me the favour which I'm asking of you. Certain that the merciful God will give you many graces needed in your life.

Your humble servant
Casimir Zeglen