

Toujours la politesse

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TOUJOURS LA POLITESSE.

Amongst my press cuttings I have come across two which caused me some anxiety. One appeared in the "Daily Express" of the 23rd of July under the heading "Keep off the grass" and reads as follows:—

Geneva, Sunday. — A policeman twice told a holidaying English lawyer and his wife that they must not lie on the grass in a Geneva park. The lawyer punched the policeman on the nose. The policeman hit the lawyer with his revolver butt and took him to jail. —

I consider that the exchange of "compliments" was somewhat overdone.

Whether this lawyer and his spouse make it a practice to lie on the grass in English parks is beyond my knowledge, it is by no means an uncommon sight here, and during my long stay in this hospitable country it has always puzzled me, why couples find it necessary to demonstrate their affection in public; it is often not a pretty sight and certainly does not add to the attraction of some of the beautiful London parks.

Not being used to the sight of such behaviour, this member of Calvin's city police force must have been deeply shocked and, no doubt, remonstrated with the culprits. If this lawyer had been a Swiss citizen, he would have known, that in Swiss parks one must not even "walk" on the grass let alone lie down, the grass must not be interfered with under any circumstances, it is to be looked at and that is all.

Being unaware of such stringent Swiss park rules and regulations this lawyer obviously resented the interference of this guardian of public order and decency, who brought their, no doubt, innocent *tête-à-tête* to such an abrupt ending, and to give vent to his feelings he promptly "punched" the policeman "on the nose". That was, of course, wrong and this lawyer ought to know that this is not done even in English parks. He ought to have explained that their behaviour was a common practice in his country to which hardly anybody shows any objection.

Not to be left out, this policeman, who did not like to have his face interfered with, in return pulled out his revolver (all Swiss policemen carry this deadly weapon), and with the "wrong" end tried to knock some sense into his aggressor, after which both lawyer and policeman "adjourned" to the police station. I do not know what happened there, but I sincerely hope that no international complications will arise, forcing H.M. Government to send a battleship to the Port of Geneva in order to safeguard the interest of H.M.'s subjects.

The second cutting was published in the "Evening Standard" of the 21st of July, under the heading "Camera man beaten", it says:

Swiss photographer Siegbert Maurer has filed criminal charges against Lugano police, who, he said, beat him up for three hours until he surrendered pictures he had taken of King Farouk and Queen Narriman.

Maurer said he had "a bleeding nose, swollen face, severe bruises, and a possible ear injury. —

This happening relates to the recent honeymoon visit of King Farouk to Lugano. The Royal visitors intended to spend a fortnight in this popular holiday resort, a part of which is called the "Paradiso".

For some reason or other, King Farouk expressed the wish that no photographs should be taken during their stay. Defying this request a Swiss press photographer could not resist the temptation to take a picture of the happy honeymoon couple, which mightily displeased his august majesty. He asked a member of his *entourage* to demand the surrender of the respective film, and after some lively arguments the film was handed over. Now in his turn the press photographer became angry, having been robbed of a valuable asset to his paper, and invoked the help of the police. The latter firmly but politely asked the King to return the film to the photographer.

Again His Majesty became very angry (by this time everyone was angry) and after a long *palavre* during which the King threatened to cut short his visit, the disputed film was handed back.

To cut a long story short, the royal visitors left this earthly Paradiso in a "huff" the very same night to continue their honeymoon in Italy, no doubt, much to the regret of the Hotel Manager and the town authorities, who only a few days previous had paid their respects in person to His Majesty.

Then came the turn for the police to get angry, and as the press photographer was handy, they started on him, trying by "gentle persuasion" to have the film returned a third time. According to reports published in the Swiss Press, this "gentle persuasion" was somewhat similar to the practice we were accustomed to hear of in camps under the Hitler regime.

The press photographer evidently did not appreciate the treatment he received, and has since started proceedings against the police and if his allegations are true, somebody will "get it in the neck".

Whatever the outcome of this unsavoury affair will be, it certainly does not enhance the reputation of our country; true enough for centuries past the Swiss enjoyed the name of being good fighters, but if there is some fighting to be done, let us fight for a nobler cause and with clean weapons.

We have often been complimented for our politeness *vis-à-vis* foreign visitors, who are not only welcome but most needed to keep our tourist industry going, and happenings like those mentioned above do not act as an incentive to foreign visitors.

A year or two ago, Madame Péron, the wife of the Argentine President, paid a courtesy visit to the Federal capital, and when driving in open carriage through the streets of Berne, one over enthusiastic spectator gave vent to his feelings by throwing an over-ripe orange into the carriage, causing discomfort to the recipient of this "affection".

Such happenings are most unfortunate and should not be tolerated. If we flatter ourselves as being what is commonly known as "civilised people" we must not transgress the rules of politeness however strong the provocation may be. ST.

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