

1896 1956

Retrospective Comments on the Games of the 1st Olympiad

Gems of the past which were published and compiled by the "Messenger of Athens"
on April 18 th 1896 at the outset of the Olympic Games

Under the rubric 'The Games and the foreign visitors', the above mentioned Greek newspaper expressed its satisfaction not only on the successful celebrations of the Olympic events, but also on the good behaviour of the inhabitants of the capital who duly upheld the Greek tradition of hospitality. We publish herewith a few extracts of these comments which seem to us sufficiently amusing to bear publication :

...The large hotels and even the smaller ones refrained from putting up their charges. They were anxious to take *care* of their foreign customers.

...The police took all necessary steps to prevent any outburst of greed on the part of those who deal daily foreign visitors. Fixed rates were put on the price of transport such as carriages and boats, meat, bread and Ash.

...Our guests, no doubt, will return to their respective countries with good opinions of our coachmen and boatmen who are much more polite here towards visitors than elsewhere. To our knowledge, not one of our visitors had cause to complain or to find fault with the tipping, a practice which anyway is unknown in our country. (Happy times! Ed.).

...The influx of Occidental visitors has not been as large as we expected. This is due to various reasons of more or less importance. The chief one being people were not certain of the ultimate success of the Games; the other reason was due to the fact that a rumour had been spreading to the effect that Cook's travelling Agency had reserved all its hotels for the use of its clients, and that although there was accommodation available

elsewhere for the other visitors, it was at prohibitive prices. If this is true, Cook's Agency rendered Greece no service.

...As a result of the success of the first Olympiad, all the foreign visitors who left, carrying the the best opinions of this manifestation expressed the wish that Athens should become the seat of all future Olympic Games which are to be celebrated every four years.

...The 'Kairi' viewed the triumphal renaissance of the Olympic Games in the light of a real revolution of the social order; princes will be called upon to encourage the practice of sport among the people.

...A source of great admiration has been the order which prevailed throughout the duration of the Games in spite of the huge attendance of foreign visitors. But what struck the visitors most was the absence of beggars, drunkards and pick-pockets.

...Rectification: Some one reported wrongly that Mr. Constantidinis, champion of the cyclists Marathon, had "bicycles broken under him". This is incorrect. There was only one punctured tyre by a nail.

...The rate of exchange came down to 170 which, people hoped would owing to the gold brought by visitors attending the Olympic Games, fall to about 160, it actually rose to 173.50 with a tendency to rise even higher. (The foreign visitors evidently brought more athletes than gold! *Ed.*).

...The Grand Hotel d'Angleterre (Today's name is Hotel Great Britain, Ed.) was entirely lit by electricity.

...All the praises addressed to the members of the Greek Olympic Committee for the perfect organiza-

tion of the Games were truly merited and the Hellenic Committee deserved its country's thanks. (We warmly approve of this final comment. *Ed.*)

At the outset of the Games of the first Olympiad, Athens bestowed thanks on all who had contributed to their success... but forgot their actual promoter :

“BARON PIERRE DE COUBERTIN”

The above was said, not by us, but appeared in the supplement of the “*Messenger d’Athènes*” of April 18th 1896, which consecrated its publication to an account of the Games celebrations of the first Olympiad at Athens. We content ourselves to reproduce these comments. Indeed, praises were correctly addressed to the Diadoque (title borne by the heir-apparent to the throne) without whom the Games could not have taken place in Greece, to their Royal Highnesses, to Mr. Philemon and Mr. Vikélas (who was appointed President of the International Olympic Committee, two years previous, by Pierre de Coubertin) etc., etc... In his speech addressed to the Diadoque, Mr. Léonidas Déligeorges said among other things: “By the munificence of the generous benefactor of Greece. Mr. Georges Avérof, you have become: **THE NEW FOUNDER OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES**”. Under the balcony of the Royal residence, the crowd acclaimed their Majesties and the Royal Family. Herewith is the reproduction of the said article:

Mr. de COUBERTIN

“Baron Pierre de Coubertin has recently sent a letter to His Majesty King Georges, in which he informed him that he had just taken the Presidency of the International Olympic Committee.

“Mr. de Coubertin recalled the fact most aptly that, although it had been much overlooked in the course of the last few days, it was he who had revived these Games which had just been celebrated with such an outstanding success in the country of their birth.

“One thing that surprised us in this country which has the memory of the heart (Let us remember that this is written by a Greek newspaper, *Ed.*) is the fact that congratulations and thanks for the success of the Games were conveyed to everybody except to the man who is their promoter.

“Is it necessary to recall the efforts displayed by Mr. de Coubertin in calling up an International Congress which decided two years ago to restore the Olympic Games? Has anyone forgotten the obstacles he encountered and had to overcome in this country even, for the first time, on Mr. Vikélas’ proposal, the resolution passed in Paris by the Congress has to be put in practice? This does not detract anything from the glorious effort of the Diadoque which we all recognized. Without him, it is doubtful if the Games would have ever been more than the usual sporting annual events, held yearly in every part of the world. Without the Diadoque, at last, we would not have a Stadium nor a Grand Stand, not the velodrome which contributed so much to the glory of the Games as well as assure their success.

“To make a grateful allusion to Mr. de Coubertin, the Promoter of the Games, would not have taken anything of the praise due to Mr. Philemon who has been the right hand of the Diadoque nor of the other collaborators of His Royal Highness.

“One may argue that the Olympic Games would have lost their international character had it been mentioned that their revival was due to a Frenchman or to a French conception. This argument has not a leg to stand on. Does one contest the right to Germany of having had the idea of Universal Postal Union? Does one dispute to Switzerland the right of having originated the Red Cross which has also an international character?

“Before passing on to the international basis, one thought unquestionably springs to the mind of the thinking man who has a home country and this on the national basis. The idea of the revival of the Olympic Games is a conception emanating from a Frenchman from France. Greece has been called upon to carry out its realization.

“She has done so with an incomparable glamour which would not have been diminished, had the name of Mr. de Coubertin been associated to those of Mr. Philemon, Vikélas and of the other collaborators of the Diadoque.

“In conclusion, let us mention that the King who is fair to everybody has graciously remembered Baron de Coubertin in sending him the insignia of the Order of the Saviour.”

Athens, April 15th 1896.

(The plate of the original paper is reproduced in the French edition of this Bulletin. *Ed.*)