

HELLO FROM VIDY

8th February, 1989. In bright sunshine, I am walking, as I endeavour to do each day, along the Lake Geneva shore, close to our Vidy headquarters. As I stroll along, I imagine Pierre de Coubertin, who knew this area well, doing the same. This was, in fact, that indefatigable walker's favourite route, and he came down here in search of inspiration for the pages he would write during the day to add to his enormous collection of manuscripts. He could not have imagined, as he passed the Chateau de Vidy, that this was where his successors would be working, half a century later.

But what became of all the documents he left behind ?

My question was answered 48 hours later on 10th February at the Sorbonne in Paris, inside the venerable Liard Amphitheatre which is as rich in associations as it is lacking in comfort. I was there to take part in a memorable ceremony arranged to mark the launch on French soil of the boxed set, published last year by the IOC, containing in three volumes the essential part of Coubertin's writings on sport and Olympism, as well as an attractive brochure which describes the man himself through words and pictures.

In charge of the proceedings was the Rector of the University of Paris, and accompanying her on the podium were the Presidents of the International Pierre de Coubertin Committee and the French Pierre de Coubertin Committee.

In the first row sat the speakers and also several UNESCO representatives and French government ministers.

The audience included numerous university rectors and professors, eminent journalists and sports officials, members of the various Pierre de Coubertin committees and many other important guests.

I doubt whether Pierre de Coubertin would have been awed by this august assembly. He would however have been both surprised and pleased to see modern Olympism thus honoured in the very room where it first came into being. He would no doubt have been appreciative of the quality of the speakers and of what they had to say. He would have seen a real-life

illustration of the humanist vocation of Olympism and of that symbiosis of sport and culture for which he strove.

There was Roger Bambuck, Secretary of State for Youth and Sports, and bronze medallist in the 4 x 100 m at the 1968 Games in Mexico ; Norbert Müller, Professor of Sports History and Sociology at the University of Mainz and prime mover behind the publication we were celebrating ; and Jean Durry, Director of the French Sports Museum.

It thus came as no surprise that such men should go straight to the heart of the issue, exploring from various angles the prodigious output of Pierre de Coubertin and the lasting and universal value of his fundamental ideas. Their opinions coincided. Our most urgent task is continually to seek to place the Games, with the considerable resources they generate and the media enthusiasm they arouse, at the service of the Olympic Movement and sport in their fullest sense. To seek to ensure that the best athletes in the world, in pursuit of excellence, provide the IOC with the means necessary for its policy of solidarity.

This may well have convinced those listening that the ceremony which they were witnessing was part of the framework of a powerful, multi-faceted and co-ordinated action which is leading the Olympic Movement towards its Centenary. Where else could this be celebrated on 23rd June 1994 than in the grand auditorium of the Sorbonne, on the very site where the IOC came into being 100 years before ?

Already the Centenary Olympic Congress, the vast gathering of the members of the Olympic Family, is taking shape. It was in this context that the IOC President recently met in Paris Messrs. François Mitterrand, President of the French Republic; Jacques Chirac, Mayor of Paris ; and Nelson Pailou, President of the NOC.

Outside on this 10th February 1989, Paris, like Lausanne two days before, was enjoying a wonderfully mild and bright day. Pierre de Coubertin would have enjoyed walking there, as on the shores of Lake Geneva, his mind burgeoning with ideas, full of the youthful spirit which permeates his works, works from which it is our duty, but also our pleasure, to draw inspiration.



By Raymond Gafner

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