

Something wrong with our police

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SOMETHING WRONG WITH OUR POLICE

In the "Sunday Times" issue of 14th September, we read the appalling story of Miss Valerie McCabe, a 26-year-old English girl who went to spend a two-week holiday with a friend in Zurich. The day after she arrived, she was met in the foyer of her hotel by two detectives who demanded the names of the people she had been out with that same morning. She was then escorted away by the police, her room had already been cleared and her belongings seized. She was deprived of her handbag and put in a cell. "It was tiny and filthy", she reported "and there was no privacy. It had a lavatory in the corner but, since the police kept a constant watch through a peephole, I couldn't use it". She stayed there two days, had her fingerprints taken exactly 20 times, was offered a total of two bowls of soup and transferred to Zug prison on the third day. There, she was locked up in a similar cell. She received three meals a day, breakfast consisted of coffee and a lump of black bread, lunch was soup and salad and supper usually a cold sausage. She spent five weeks solitary confinement in that prison *without being charged*. She was in such a mental and physical state that she had to be helped through her daily half-hour exercises. For six days she was continuously interrogated, usually for seven to eight hours at a time, and was told that if she didn't confess, she would remain in prison for as long as the police wished. Her questioners made her repeat the story of her arrival in Zurich over and over again and each time her conclusions had to be the same.

Finally, after the British Consul had intervened, she was removed from prison and told that she would be flown back the following day. Her cases and money were returned to her and she was put on a plane for London.

This was the most hideous and nightmarish story I had ever read anywhere. May we believe it? According to the report, Miss McCabe was held for questioning in connection with counterfeiting offences, we are not given any details. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, this affair had not produced any repercussions and I was disappointed at not finding it mentioned in the Monday papers. If Miss McCabe's story is proved to be true I hope that everything possible will be undertaken to make amends for her horrible adventure. I have no doubt that our Ambassador and his collaborators will do all within their powers to that end.

Having lived through the following misadventure, I have some grounds for believing what Miss McCabe said to the "Sunday Times" was true.

On the morning of April the 29th, before being called with other passengers to Zurich at the West London Air Terminal, I bought two hundred Swiss francs at the bureau de change. I asked for one hundred-franc note and the rest in smaller denominations.

24 hours after having arrived in Zurich, I went to the main-line station to take a train to Geneva. I presented my hundred-franc note to the counter clerk. He took it, fumbled with it a moment as though his fingers were thinking already and suddenly clenched it hard. "*Sie ist falsch!*" he gasped. With a remarkable presence of mind, he spun round the cash turn-table to his side, so that I couldn't make-off with the change that was lying on my side and told me to come to his office. I complied good-humouredly and went to the ticket-office's backstage where a good dozen clerks, bubbling with excitement, were looking through my note from all angles. I got a chance to touch it too—not to retrieve it, alas!—and could realise for myself that the paper on which it was forged was of cheap quality. To a profane eye, the imitation was perfect but the paper was as different from that of a real note as Velin letter-paper might be from standard type-writing paper. Eventually, the excited crowd realised my presence and knew not quite what to do with me. I suppose that with some presence of mind and determination, I might have had a good chance of walking out of the office and catching my train without further trouble. But I was quite willing to be helpful and help clear the matter up. After some lingering, a young clerk from the station police office called for me and asked me to follow him. I was brought to an office above the station and had to wait an hour and a half for the counterfeit specialist, who was having his lunch, to arrive.

Mr. "A" (that's the specialist's name) entered the office with a rather bored expression on his face. In fact, judging from his looks and his lack of civility, I was just another of the innumerable scoundrels he has to deal with, already guilty of circulating forged notes. I exposed my story with a great air of innocence, expecting ingenuously that this would suffice. Good joke!—must have thought Mr. "A", but he wasn't smiling then, (he began to be nice only a few hours later, disarmed by my unexpected co-operation. . .). I was told to pick up my two bags and go downstairs. His colleague was waiting for us and they escorted me firmly to a parked police-car. I remember being nudged none-too-gently after I

had stopped a moment, thinking I had spotted an acquaintance walking in the street. In the car I made a few sociable remarks but they remained adamant.

We reached their headquarters next to the Kaserne, we climbed to the first floor, entered office No. 13 where Mr. "B", "A"'s colleague greeted me with an interested look, visibly less repulsed by suspected criminals. I was told to empty my pockets, to turn them out, and was shown into the "Warte-zimmer" (waiting-room). Its door was locked behind me, it had three separate locks and I can certify that it was made of solid material. The windows were barred, there was a table and a bench and, in the guise of entertainment, a pile of "Swiss Hunting Revues". An hour elapsed during which Mr. "A" must have scrutinized every thread of my socks and shirts. The three locks were successively freed and Mr. "A", surely disappointed with the meagre results of his search, appeared and asked me to undress. I stood stark naked in the middle of the "waiting-room" whilst Mr. "A" walked twice round me, overlooking nothing. He told me to dress again and we went back to the office for a deposition that was to take a good two hours.

It was a laborious business. Mr. "A" worked rather slowly but he was thorough, I will grant him that! Needless to say, I had to give full details of the reasons for my journey and every single step I had made within the previous twenty-four hours. Whom had I seen after having left the air-terminal? Where does this person live and what does he do? What did I do next and at what time? Who was this second chap to whom you paid a call? What did you do between the time you left him and your next appointment? You gave a phone call, to whom? You went to a café, which one? What did you do in the evening and who was with you? Where did you spend the night? Which friends, give me their address. Where did you go in the morning? Which train did you take to go back to Zurich? How did you fill that time gap? What were you going to do in Geneva? Give me the addresses of the people you will meet there. And so on . . .

This enquiry was frequently interrupted by telephone calls relating to other matters which apparently were keeping "A" and "B" very excited as they were having prolonged arguments on the course they should take, during which I was fidgeting in my chair, wondering when they would deign to give their attention to my case once again. My blood pressure was distinctly

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on the increase. The boss, who worked in the next office, was busy phoning Bern and Interpol about my case, but I was told this only later. Mr. "A" went to see him at least four times during the deposition, never forgetting to tell his colleague to keep a good watch over me. Eventually, the boss came himself into the office. He was a gruff chap and looked at me menacingly. Thinking that he should do his useful bit in the inquest, he asked me how I had spent my money in Zurich. So, emulating their thoroughness I told him: "five francs for the coach from the airport, 60 centimes for the luggage deposit, 50 centimes for the tram to Bellevueplatz, 6 francs 30 for my lunch, 40 centimes for a paper, 50 for a tram ride to Voltastrasse, 50 again to reach Romerhof . . ." but the interrogation did not proceed much longer along that line. Mr. "A" was so meticulous that at one time I burst out in laughter. He blushed and was visibly shaken. I believe that my irreverence had chipped a crack in his bulwark, the machinery of which he was an integral part. His sudden weakness showed me that, beneath the cast of a paragon of the Zurich Police, there was still some humanity left.

In the end, Mr. "A" became very decent and even offered me cigarettes. We had a frank conversation in which I questioned his methods. His answer was straightforward and firm like a faith: "every man brought to me," he said, "has to be considered a suspect right from the start."

"Fair enough", I said, "but my behaviour has clearly pointed to my innocence: you have had all the time to check my statement by contacting Barclay's branch at the West London Air Terminal, you found strictly nothing incriminating in my luggage, I didn't approach the ticket-office with a suspicious look and I did not try to run for it when the clerk found that my note was forged."

"I've had the most innocent-looking people" he answered, "smiling and angelic, but when I search them in the waiting-room they turn out to be crooks. This has happened time after time and I could spend a night telling you stories. Therefore we cannot admit any exceptions. We have searched you because it had to be done—better dispatch this formality right from the start, so it's done and we can clear you on that point."

"But why not at least give some kind of *explanation* to the unfortunate fellow who, as in my case, has been given forged banknotes and warn him politely of the kind of inconvenience he will have to be submitted to."

I got no answer to this question and I don't think I brought the message home. What he (and the police in general) had done was both necessary and legal and therefore there couldn't be any ground for misgivings. That an innocent man had been badly inconvenienced was quite irrelevant,

the police were there to deal with criminals, not susceptible humans. This, at least, is how I believe Mr. "A"'s mind ticked. He has bathed all his career in the well-oiled gearing of police administration and loves it. He is profoundly convinced of the police's excellence as the guardian of a good society and it must be psychologically impossible for him to believe that the police could possibly make mistakes.

Our conversation had to stop because of duty. Mr. "A" asked me, somewhat embarrassed, whether I would return to the waiting-room while he and his colleagues would check my statement by calling at my friends. This time I was allowed to have my cigarettes and reading-matter. It was half past five and I had been detained for six hours. The waiting-room was to be my abode for another two hours. My most relaxing distraction was to decipher the colourful (but unreportable) messages traced on the door by my predecessors. The boss of the department payed me a visit and told me that Mr. "A" had got lost in the countryside north of Zurich on his way back from seeing my hosts of the previous night, who lived at Hinteregg, at an address I had indicated in Schwerzenbach. But after having had two confirmations of my statement, Mr. "A" radioed to headquarters and I was set free after a total detention of over eight hours.

The next morning, every bank in Switzerland was informed of the forgeries and within ten days, four men (two Germans and two Englishmen, if my memory is correct) were arrested in a Munich villa where 1200 forged notes were found. In London, two detectives rang at my home and were received by the housecleaner, who resolutely refused to let them in!

To sum up, my legitimate complaints are that I was detained with no explanations, morally injured in being considered a criminal, given no food and forbidden contacts with the outside world, shamelessly obliged to strip off my clothes and (for the record) accompanied in a place where one usually prefers privacy. Above this, my passport was kept for a week and I received *no apologies*.

Such a misadventure could have happened to any one—headmaster, butcher, chartered accountant, entrepreneur, scientist or clergyman, and I am sure it would have been a very serious blow to anyone clinging hard to his self-esteem.

I was told to expect a nonsuit from the Attorney-General in Bern. It hasn't come yet and I am still waiting. Barclays Bank has refunded me ten pounds: at least they believe in my innocence. I hope that Miss McCabe's adventure, if it is really as dramatic as reported in the "Sunday Times", whips up a good, devastating gale in Swiss opinion so that such treatment will be completely undreamt of in future.

P.M.B.

Johannes Klaesi (80), founder of the firm "Nuxo" in Rapperswil. Applying the dietetic ideas of Dr. Bircher and Dr. Fischer, he pioneered into the use of nuts as a source of fats and proteins.

Paul Boesch (80), internationally renowned painter and drawer. He produced a number of books on heraldry and was a prominent painter on glass. He designed numerous pro-juventute and pro-patria stamps and produced admirable wood-cuts. He was well known to children for illustrating the Pestalozzi Calendar. His works decorate a large number of public buildings in Switzerland.

Professor Eugen Meyer-Peter, professor in hydraulics and civil engineering at the Polytechnic in Zurich. He was director of the Institute of Hydraulic Constructions and has made extensive contributions in this field of engineering.

The Rev. Paul Béguin (80), director of the hospital of St. Loup (Vd) for thirty-five years.

Casimir Raymond (76), sculptor and painter. Casimir Raymond is well known for his creation of the relief in the chapel of Montfaucon in Lausanne, for his statues in the Palais de Beaulieu and for his busts of Ramuz and General Guisan. As a painter on glass, he designed the windows of the churches of Romainmotier, Echallens and Lutry.

National Councillor Armin Haller (58), of a heart attack. Former secretary of the Bernese union of shopkeepers, founder and president of the cantonal federation of employees' unions, general agent for the "Neuchateloise" insurance company, publicist of the foundation "for the aged" and founder of "action p", a self-help organisation for pensioners.

Dr. H. C. Hans Noll, ornithologist, (84). Teacher for many years at the educational centres of Oberkirch (SG) and Glarisegg, he has taught biology at the Realgymnasium of Basle since 1932. He is well known for a two-volume comprehensive work on hatching birds.

Dr. H. C. Clavel, inventor and air-pioneer. Also well known for historical research which earned him an honoris-causa-doctorate from the University of Basle. He has contributed to the foundation of an antique museum in the same town.

Emile Gos, photographer and film-producer, (81). He was well known for his illustrations of the albums conceived by his brother, Francois Gros, such as "Au Pays des Muerans", and "Les Alpes de Savoie". He has produced a number of mountain films, in particular, "La Croix du Cervin".

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