

# Per Henrik Ling

On the Occasion of the One Hundredth Anniversary of His Death

By Carl Diem

"The more completely a youth learns to depend in his actions upon his own merits, to endure physical pain, to rely upon the inner conviction of his own strength in all times of danger, to deal with every momentary contingency, not in haste but with deliberation, the closer he will approach the standard of the man and true warrior. The Spartans and Goths were such, and understood how to awaken manly strength through their gymnastics."

These words by Per Henrik Ling present the image that dominated his thought: Spartans and Goths, or in other words, strength of race and the human ideal of a complete system of training, such as that developed by the Spartans. Ling was a patriot and servant to mankind, gymnast and poet — related in spirit to the German father of gymnastics, Jahn.

He originated from peasant stock, his family tree, which extends into the sixteenth century, including Swedish clergymen and before them, peasants. His great grandfather had seventeen sons and two daughters, and is said to have reached the age of 105 years. Ling himself was born in 1776 in a village of Smoland, and studied in Lund, Upsala and later in Copenhagen. Being versed in languages, he undertook the study of Goethe and Schiller, the Edda and northern mythology, composed original poems in Swedish, German, French and Danish, and in general followed his inclinations in the intellectual and poetic field as an artistically impressionable, highly gifted youth. He learnt fencing at a school of French emigres and at the same time observed the favourable influence of physical training upon his gouty arm. This led him to turn his life interests into this channel. He read GutsMuths' book "Gymnastics for the Youth", participated in the gymnastic exercises of the originator of Danish gymnastics, Nachttegall, and returned in 1804 to his native country in order to establish a gymnastic institute.

He began as university fencing master at Lund and was the first to introduce "gymnastics" in Sweden. "Whereas students formerly shouted Latin until they were hoarse, they now set to work to strengthen their bodies", wrote a visitor during this period. In 1813 Ling settled in Stockholm, not however, to teach gymnastics in the Capital City, but to campaign with his poet friends of the "Gothic League" for an "United Scandinavia". All were deeply concerned over the loss of Finland, which had been ceded to Russia following the Napoleonic Wars. Thus in the case of Ling, as in that of the German Jahn, the Dane Nachttegall, and the Frenchman Coubertin, an ardent patriotism and love of country provided the hidden source of his struggle to further gymnastics. The same principle might be applied to Ling, Jahn and Coubertin; the spiritual force emanating from this source lent them the creative force which is effective even to the present day. All three, however, were drawn from the intellectually creative sphere by the practical demands of their chosen field, Ling becoming gymnastic instructor in the Military Academy at Carlsberg. One year later he established the Royal Gymnastic Central Institute, remaining at this post until the end of his life.

He provided from the very beginning a scientific foundation for his work, following to a certain extent the principles of GutsMuths. He first studied anatomy, and as a result of his investigations, evolved the fundamental principle which applies to all periods: There can be no single, general and unchangeable system of gymnastics, but they must be adapted to the people of a certain period, their habits and nature. The staunch axis of all methodism in this field is the knowledge of the structure of the human body and the process of human life, the recognition of which fact we owe to Ling. Today, we are naturally much more advanced than Ling, and in another century our descendants will have progressed still further. Through the work of Ling we have developed, and this must continue as a result of our efforts at the present time, but Ling's fundamental principle remains unchanged: "According to the law governing the actions of man . . . . ."

Ling left us no comprehensive work dealing with his system of gymnastics. He was a man of experience and his teaching was of a personal nature. From the very beginning he instructed boys of seven and eight years of age and then students. He even taught children occasionally. His establishment pulsated with life but was carefully ordered. He permitted and demanded consideration for the individual, a tendency which we today know as compensative gymnastics and which is possible in conjunction with appropriate scientific schooling but in the cursory training of gymnastic trainers is better omitted. He demanded military discipline and gay singing, character and at the same time *joie de vivre*; he insisted upon intensive application but avoided boring repetition; he exercised without apparatus, devising imitative tasks such as "spinning", "sawing", and "chopping". He swam, shot and skated, and he made use of apparatus such as the rope and balancing

beam. The first apparatus that he ordered was a "Voltigierbock" and the last that he dropped from his hand was the épée. In fact, a few days before his death at the age of 63 he fenced with a young fencing instructor until his opponent was exhausted.

Ling's work has not only taken firm root among his own people, but has acquired world-wide fame. It was once jokingly referred to as a good Swedish export. Other nations have adopted his system or still more important, have analysed it. No system of physical education has remained uninfluenced by it because it contains human values which apply to every age.

Ling has been rightly described as one of the greatest hygienists of our time, as a man in every sense of the word, and — permit me to repeat — is justly renowned as a patriot and servant of mankind.

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## Probleme des olympischen Programms

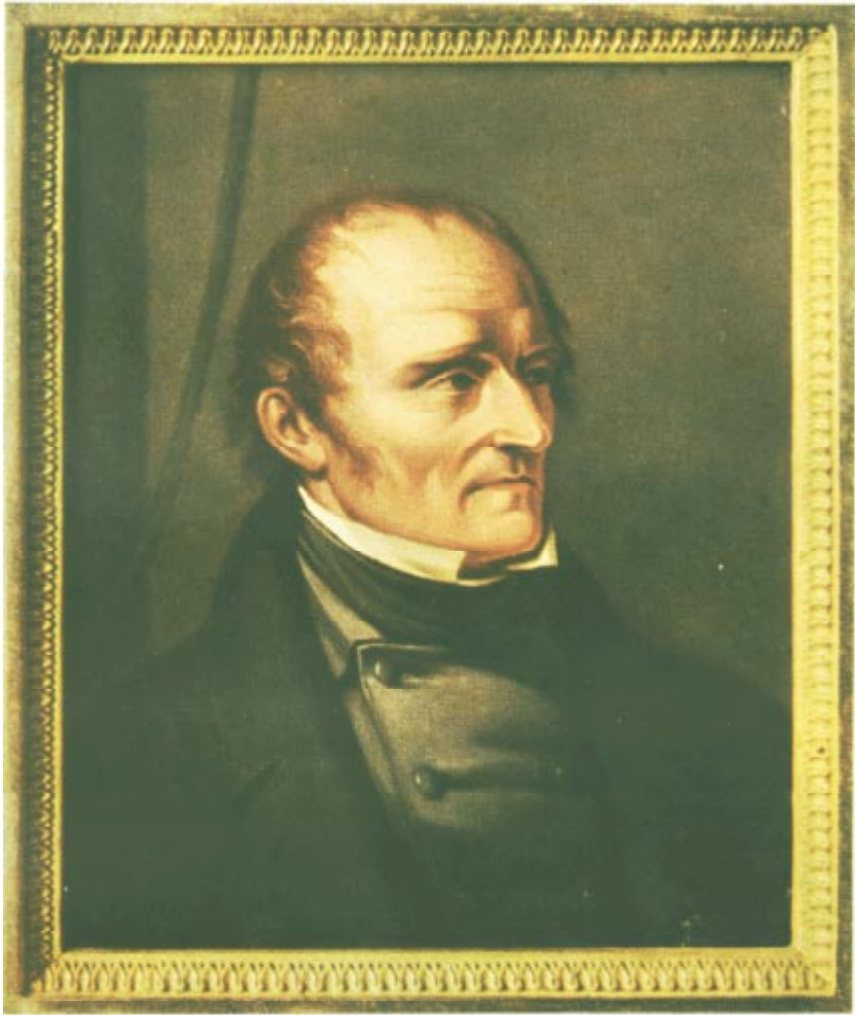
Von Carl Diem

Coubertin hat mit genialer Voraussicht das Geheimnis der antiken olympischen Spiele festgehalten und es doch vermieden, aus ihnen eine antikisierende Ruine zu machen. Er forderte die Beibehaltung der olympischen 'Zeitspanne von vier Jahren „mit astronomischer Genauigkeit“ und hat damit genau jenes Zeitmaß getroffen, das weit genug gespannt ist, um alle Kräfte für die neue Veranstaltung zu sammeln, und wiederum nahe genug, um den Zusammenhang von einer zur anderen nicht zu verlieren.

Coubertin lehnte jedoch die Übernahme des antiken Sportprogramms ab. Der Inhalt seiner Spiele sollte der Sport unserer Zeit sein, und nichts ist dafür mehr kennzeichnend, als der von ihm begründete Moderne Fünfkampf. War der Fünfkampf der Griechen das Ideal des vollkommenen Mannes ihrer Zeit, so sollte der Fünfkampf Coubertins den vollkommenen Soldaten unserer Zeit bedeuten. Denn hinter diesem Modernen Fünfkampf steht der militärische Geist Coubertins, den er nie geleugnet hat, den er aber an seine Stelle setzte, indem er sagte: „Der Sport macht zum Kriege fähig, aber er führt nicht dazu“.

Coubertins Schlagwort für die Spiele der Neuzeit lautete „all games all nations“. Das hat er ausgezeichnet in seiner Rede von London (1908) geprägt. In diesem Sinne enthält das Programm der Spiele alle modernen Sports, und es war im Geiste Coubertins folgerichtig, daß das Internationale Olympische Komitee auf seiner Nil-Sitzung 1938 das Segelfliegen als jüngstes Sportglied unserer Zeit mit aufnahm.

Nun wußte Coubertin auch Um den geheimen Zauber des klassischen Geistes, der die Spiele umweht, und der seinen Ursprung in der Beständigkeit und regelmäßigen Wiederkehr des Ablaufs hat. Eine getreu bewahrte Sitte macht ehrwürdig, und so wollte Coubertin das Sportprogramm dem allzu schnellen Wechsel entziehen. Er schuf ein Standardprogramm und suchte auf die internationalen Sportverbände einzuwirken, daß sie in ihren olympischen Wettbewerben möglichst beharrlich blieben. Ich darf als Zeuge dessen gelten, denn diese Bemühungen Coubertins setzten im Jahre 1913 ein, und ich weilte als der Generalsekretär der



*Per Henrik Ling (1776—1839)*

ÖLBILD VON J. G. SANDBERG



Das Gemälde gehörte früher zur Sammlung Karls XV. und befindet sich jetzt im National-Museum zu Gripsholm. Es wurde als Vorlage für die Briefmarke verwandt, die die Königlich-Schwedische Postverwaltung aus Anlaß der Hundertjahrfeier herausgibt.

Durch Vermittlung des Schwedischen Gymnastikverbandes (Svenska Gymnastikförbundet), Stockholm.