

# RELIGIO ATHLETAE

by *PIERRE DE COUBERTIN*

There are two ways of regarding athletic sport : first, the individual point of view, which is the best and most desirable. On the day when a nation exists in which each young man possesses sufficient taste for athletic exercises to make him practise them regularly, either alone or with his comrades, seeking in wholesome sports an admirable means to perfect his health and increase his strength, then on that day humanity — or a section of it, at least — will have realised perfection. But we are not there yet, and hence we are constrained to regard athletic sport from a second and quite different point of view — that of organised competition. Athletics for the sake of winning something : this is at once the potent incentive and the dangerous canker with which we have to reckon. Potent incentive, we cannot deny ; the most potent of all, in fact. Human society is worked by the principle of competition ; it has always been so, and is so more than ever. Competition is becoming more and more intense, bringing in its train greater and greater dangers of corruption. Unbridled competition entails grave risks to the spirit of fair play, occasions the commission of blameworthy acts, engenders even an atmosphere of jealousy, envy, vanity and mistrust. This may be seen in all franchises

of activity, and athletic life cannot escape from it. Certainly athletic organisations, societies and federations lead no placid and peaceful existence ; they are torn by violent quarrels, and too often seek to injure one another, to steal away each other's champions. This state of things will continue, being, indeed, almost inevitable. We are forced to acknowledge that the individual practice of athletic sports, regularly and perseveringly undertaken for the sake of health, beauty and harmony is more or less a chimera.. A few individuals may be capable of this but the rank and file never will be.

We must therefore fall back upon the system of organised competition, and allow it to dominate athletic sport. But we can give it a counterpoise, a regulator, as did those ancient Greeks who, we find had to grapple with most of the problems that perplex us ; and their regulator was Olympia. At Olympia vulgar competition was transformed and in a sense sanctified, by contact with national sentiment superbly excited.

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