

OLYMPIC PEACE - WORLD PEACE

by D^r F. Mezö, member of the I.O.C. for Hungary

The past history of Olympia is revealed to us through some of the Grecian myths. One of these legends relates how Hercules organized a foot race for his four brothers and besought the people of the neighbouring countries to live in peace.

Hercules, says Lysias, the famous orator in his Olympic speech « the Olympiakos » believed that our meetings in Olympia would form the basis of unity and friendship amongst the Greeks.

In early history, the name of Iphitos, king of Elide, a country in southern Greece, makes its first appearance. Warfare was the chief pastime in the life of the Greeks from the earliest days on. This king seeing that all the tribes of the Peloponese were continually fighting each other besides suffering from a deadly epidemic, sent « Heralds » to Delphé to learn from the gods how these troubles could be cured for ever. According to the wishes of the gods, the king had to renew the Olympic Games which had fallen into oblivion. For that purpose he joined the King of Sparta, the wise Lykourgos, and concluded with him an agreement according to which:

« Olympia is recognized as Zeus' sacred place. Whoever ventures to enter it armed in anyway will be stigmatized as a godless man, and just in the same way, he who does not avenge any breach of the Truce, according to his strength is also looked upon as a godless man » (Strabon, VIII 3,33).

This covenant was engraved on a disk, made of bronze, and placed in Hera's temple in Olympia. Aristotle, the greatest genius of the ancient times (384-22 B. C.) and even Pausanias, the « Baedeker » of the 2nd and 3rd. century B. C. actually saw this exceedingly precious « clenodium » the first document on Sports of the world.

Thanks to this agreement the State of Elide was protected from all hostilities or attacks for centuries. The competing athletes as well as their attendants, in fact all the pilgrims had to be protected from any assault or molestation during their journey to and from Olympia. This necessity called for special measures, embodied in the famous Sacred Truce expressed in Greek: « ekecheiria » i. e. hands off Plutarch tells us that this Truce was also established by Lykourgos and Iphitos (Lykourgos c. I).

Some months before the outset of the Olympic Games, Heralds « therroi spondophoroi » in greek, were sent by the inhabitants of Elide in all directions to invite the Greek States to attend the Olympic Games. At the same time they also proclaimed the entering into force of the Sacred Truce all over Greece. Originally its term of duration seems to have been effective only for one month, but since the competitors were compelled to spend 30 days in Elide in one of its gymnasiums, or in Olympia prior to

the Games, in order to train under the supervision of the Greeks umpires (the so called « hellanodikai ») and as the far-away countries and city-states (Egypt, Asia-Minor, Kyrene, Rhodes, etc.) also sent their youth to Olympia, the Sacred Truce had to be extended to a period of three months. During this time an armistice came into force i. e. the arms had to be laid down and everybody could travel unmolested. Whoever broke the Sacred Truce was severely punished.

During the Peloponesian War (431-404 B. C.) Sparta attacked the fortress of Pyrgos, and sent one thousand fully equipped soldiers to Lepreon, the neighbouring village of Elide, and this, after the proclamation of the Sacred Truce. Elide imposed a very severe fine on Sparta. It had to pay 2 mnas per soldier i. e. altogether 2000 mnas, at that time for that sum one could buy 6600 oxen. Sparta refused to pay this fine thereupon Elide excluded Sparta from the next Olympic Games held in 420 b. C. (Thoukydides V. 49).

Phrynon, a citizen of Athens, wanted to attend the Olympic Games, unfortunately there is no date from the ancient times recording what the aim of his pilgrimage was i. e. whether he wanted to attend the Games as a competitor or a spectator only. On his way to Olympia he was attacked by mercenaries at the pay of Philip II., king of Macedonia. They molested and robbed him. After his return, he reported the incident to the council of the people and asked to be allowed to go to the King and demand satisfaction. The council agreed to his wish and gave him as spokesman and counsellor Ktesiphon, the great statesman. Philip received them in a friendly manner, apologized for his soldiers' dismeasour, who had not known that the Truce was in force and offered Phrynon generous compensations (Demosthenes: De falsa legatione, argumen, p. 335).

During the reign of his son, Alexander the Great, the number of refugees attained alarming proportions all over Greece. Therefore the young king decided to send them back to their own countries, partly in order to increase his glory, partly to make himself popular everywhere in the Greek cities. He believed the Olympic Games to be the greatest Greek publicity and Olympia to be the ideal centre of peace and the most suitable place to realize his purposes. With this aim in view he sent his confident Nikanor to the Games held 324 b. C., giving him a letter with the request to let it be published by the successful winners of the Herald's competition. Its text was as follows:

Alexander the Great to the refugees of all the cities: « It was not I who was the cause of your exile but I shall be the means of your return to your own countries except for such who are guilty of severe crimes. To that effect I wrote to Antipatros to force those States who hesitate to acquiesce. »

The Olympic crowd acknowledged the king's message with great applause. The

refugees more than 20000 being present at the festivities were full of joy and praised Alexander's benevolence in return. (Diodorus, Siculus XVIII, 8.)

Also the minor Games (at Delphi, Korinthos, Nemea) had a shorter Truce, but Olympia remained the cradle of the Greek idea of peace as long as its splendour and authority lasted.

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The mighty maker of the Olympic Movement of our age, de Coubertin, when restoring the Olympic Games of the ancient times also assigned peace and brotherhood amongst the different nations and races as an essential part of the Olympic Movement and one of its greatest aims. He stated in his Memoirs that the reborn Olympic Movement since its beginning proved to be very valuable. (Mémoires olympiques p. 32.) How high he estimated world-peace is shown by his broadcast held on Aug. 4th. 1935: « As far as I am concerned I would heartily welcome the idea of the belligerents in time of war, interrupting their fight for a time in order to celebrate the Games, and display the strength of their muscles in a loyal and chivalrous manner. »

Baillet-Latour inherited Coubertin's sincere love of peace. « May Heaven allow, said he at the Congress of the I.O.C. held at Oslo in 1935, that the XIth Olympiad may bring forth an era of peace by the hearty and mutual consent of all the youth who will thus ensure the development of peace and happiness in their own native land as a well as in the outside world. »

Also our present chairman J. S. Edström expressed his feelings in bidding a hearty farewell after the London Games in 1948, saying:

« In my numerous visits to the Olympic meetings and camps I found everywhere young athletes foregathering in comradeship and making ties of friendship. These I feel confident, will last all their lives and I hope may create the brotherhood of men which is an imperative necessity to the Peace of the World. » (Olympic Games 1948, p. 6.)

Also the Olympic badge the five interlaced rings is a magnificent symbol of the brotherhood of the whole of mankind.

A brilliant interpretation of the Olympic idea, in existence for almost 3000 Years is the Olympic Village. It existed in ancient times we learn from Pausanias, that close to the western side of the gymnasium at Olympia, rooms were built to accommodate the competing athletes (Pausanias VI. 21, 2). In modern times, an Olympic Village was founded for the first time in 1932 and also in 1936. On both occasions the idea proved to be a stroke of genius, the young people of the five continents lived together in brotherly love and perfect understanding for weeks, despite the difference of languages,

habits, and appearances, never once did a quarrel break out amongst them. In the Olympic Village they had the opportunity to get to know each other and to exchange views and ideas also they could contract bonds of friendship lasting for life. Community life without a doubt, will promote the desirable understanding amongst the enthusiastic youngsters of the world of today and to-morrow.

The Olympic idea will always remain the most effective influence towards international peace and harmony.

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On the threshold of the Olympic year of 1948, I wrote an article entitled « Olympic Peace » in the Pictorial Sports Magazine (Kèpes Ujsag) in Budapest.

I wrote: « All over the world millions of people are already eager to know who will be made immortal in the annals of Sports by winning the Olympic gold Medal, thus crowning with glory his country or nation by his victory. I wish to give a sincere word of warning to the competitors. The Olympic Gold Medal cannot sparkle in full splendour unless decorating the breast of the best the most deserving athlete. The future Olympic Games can only be of value if the prominent young people of the Soviet-Union, one of the greatest Sport power, take part too and if the youth of all the fair minded nations of the world shake hands before and after the contest with brotherly love. »

« Perhaps it will not be misunderstood if I, as a humble penman of the Olympic Movement, solicit his leaders of the Soviet Sporting Movement to form their Olympic Committee at an early date and join the I.O.C., the loftiest body of sport: the Olympic Community. There can be no doubt that the entire sporting world would warmly approve of such a step. » (Kèpes Ujsag Dec. 23rd. 1947.)

As a matter of fact this point was raised in Vienna some weeks ago and I am deeply convinced that the splendid resolution of the Sport leaders of the Soviet Union followed by the wise resolution of the I.O.C. will make the next Olympic Year of 1952 an era of peace and friendship. The jolly youths of East and West will foregather in the Stadium and congratulate each other on their triumphs with sincerity and with a feeling of fairplay true to all sportsmen. It is my warmest desire that the Olympic Peace should grow into an everlasting world peace.

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In de Coubertin's broadcast quoted earlier on in this text this further sentence was heard: « Olympism belongs to historiography. To celebrate the Olympic Games means to refer to the history which can best insure peace. »

The old Latin proverb « Inter arma silent Musae, i. e. »: Amongst weapons the Muses become silent; can also be applied to the greatest display of physical culture: The Olympic Games. In ancient days the clash of arms stopped when the Olympic Games approached; but in our new era, and this belongs to the darkest pages of the history of Olympism, the clash of arms prevented their celebration three times within half a century!

Actually the firmament is again darkened by clouds and threats of war, the I. O. C. and all its members only act in the spirit of the Olympic ideal if they help within their capacity to prevent the outbreak of the storm. To contribute to this aim I am adding my modest endeavour in pointing out that one of the main objects of Olympism, besides the development of physical culture, is to foster concord, peace and universal understanding among the people.

It is evident that culture, physical and mental is a present of peace and brings great happiness in our lives.