

# PIERRE DE COUBERTIN'S ANCESTRY

By Dr CARL DIEM

Time has not yet come to appreciate at its true value de Coubertin's work and his personality. It cannot be viewed in its proper perspective and one has not yet gone through the voluminous documents and papers which he left behind. Amongst these papers is to be found a brief curriculum vitae which will be of the greatest assistance to those who, later on, may desire to write his biography.

The subject matter under present consideration is the history of Pierre de Fredy, Baron de Coubertin's ancestral lineage.

In male descent, one can trace his genealogy back to the Italian origin of the family de Fredis native of Rome, where descendants are still living. It was near Viterbo, one of his ancestor's estate, that Felici de Fredis discovered the group of Laocoon which he presented to the Pope Julius II. It remained ever since of the finest masterpiece of the Vatican's Museum.

Felici de Fredis' tomb is to be found in the church of Ara Coelis, near the Capitol in Rome.

A branch of the family emigrated to France where records relate how one Pierre de Fredy, Lord de la Motte, became Chamberlain to the King of France Louis XI. In 1477 he was granted a new French coat of arms, on the escutcheon of azure field were nine golden shells, symbols of the newly founded Order of St-Michael. His son Alphonse married Marie Blute and died in 1553. They had three children, one of whom, Jean Fredy (1518-1598) wedded Radegon de Platrier, a wealthy merchant's daughter. He was himself a rich trader in spices. In the year 1577, he purchased the Estates of Coubertin, a property which lies within 3 miles of Versailles, it came through the Revolution unscathed and has remained in the hands of the family ever since.

The family records which were kept there, remained intact and in good state of preservation, escaping destruction due to fire or displacing. We find amongst the original owners of Coubertin, a family bearing the name of de Bergerac, who, in later years became distant relations of the Fredys. In 1589, Jean Fredy married for the second time Catherine Boisdin. His son, named Jean, after him, held the position of Barrister at law in Parliament. His Patent of Nobility was renewed by the King Louis XIII, despite the fact that his father had been in trade. He married Madeleine Rémy in 1624. The youngest of their four children, Michael (1629-1685), married in 1660, Mar-

guerite Fournier who bore him eight children, the fifth of them, François Fredy (1668-1742), became a naval officer, he distinguished himself in battles where he was wounded twice. One of his cousin, who had acquired an enormous fortune in the East India Trading Company, built for him the magnificent castle of Coubertin. François married in 1711 Marie Morel whose mother was the niece of the famous Cyrano de Bergerac.

They raised a large family of ten children, one of them, Pierre, Lord of Coubertin (1716-1778), became Chief Councillor to the « Cour des Aides » of Paris. He married in 1744 Marie Louise Marguerite Chambauld, daughter of an artillery officer in the Guards and Knight of St-Louis. They had nine children all died except one, who survived, his name was François Louis Fredy (1752-1807), who, at the early age of twenty five became a well-known advocate like his own father, he also held the position of Counsel of the « Cour des Aides ». He married in 1780 Adélaïde Jeanne Geneviève Sandrier. In 1790, the Cour des Aides was abolished and the « citizen » Fredy, who called himself either Fredy Coubertin or Fredy « dit Coubertin » according to political needs, went through the Revolution unmolested while one of his kinsman Henry Louis de Fredy came to a tragic end at the age of 73 when he was beheaded. François Louis Fredy's son, Julien Bonaventure (1788-1871), married in 1821 Caroline de Pardieu, whose family came from Normandy, tracing their genealogical descent as far back as 1260 and whose ancestors distinguished themselves at the Crusades. It is through her that the Fredys became related to the old family of the Count de Berthier. Caroline was actually the grand-daughter of the Count de Berthier de Sauvigny, who, as Intendant of the town of Paris, was murdered in front of the Town-Hall in 1789. Julien Bonaventure followed Napoléon in Germany where he held the position of Consul for a while at Cuxhaven and « Sous-Préfet » at Oldenburg. His Patent of Nobility and titles were restored and he was made Knight in the Legion d'Honneur. Julien Bonaventure was a gifted musician, he played the violin outstandingly well and the family trace their artistic talent to him. His son, Charles Louis de Fredy (1822-1908), became fairly well known as an artist of « Subject painting ».

Amongst his compositions are a few religious and historical pictures, one representing the discovery of the famous Laocoon by his ancestor. He also left sketches and paintings of Church Interiors. He wedded Agathe Gabrielle de Gisenoy de Mirville. The Eudes de Mirville, on the maternal side,



---

also came from Normandy. It was in their castle of Mirville, in the neighbourhood of Le Havre, that during thirty years, their son, Pierre de Coubertin, the Reviver of the Olympic Games, spent all his summer vacation. He was the third of four children, he was born on the 1st. of January 1863 and died on September 2nd. 1937. In his veins run the blood of his Italian ancestors, of French Nobility, French Bourgeoisie also the blood of the Norman knights who came to France with William the Conqueror. Court officials, merchants, jurists, soldiers and artists all these ancestors enjoyed wealth and fulfilled their destinies based on tradition and honour these qualities they handed down to posterity. The country origin of the de Coubertins was deep rooted and intimately connected with French soil and as he mentioned in his Memoirs, he felt in him the kindling of good old Norman blood. From his grandparents' ancestral home, a castle built high on the cliffs he felt the strong urge of the sea. From this unique setting, he drew all his inspirations, his dreams materialized the gigantic life work he was to hand down to posterity as his valuable legacy, all these came to light there.