

Concerning the Olympic Oath

by A. P.

André SENAY and Robert HERVET make the following reference in their book *Monsieur de Coubertin* (page 36):

'1906 also marks the time when the concepts of the Olympic oath sprung up like ripe corn. The oath was carried out in a *most impressive ceremony* in the course of which the athlete engaged his honour when taking the oath. Thus, *simplifying the inquiries concerning his status*. (Coubertin *dixit*). In the issue of the *Olympic Review*, dated July 1906, one can read the contents of a letter addressed in the spring of that year to Charles Simon, promoter of the French Interfederal Committee and Gen. Secy, of the Gymnastic Federation and Sports League of France (which became, in 1946, the French Sports Federation). He preconized the institution of the Olympic oath.'

Did the Renovator of the Games really believe in the efficacy of this oath? Always under the influence of the Ancient Olympics, he was of course aware of the fact that the Greek athletes swore to respect and abide by the rules of the Pan-hellenic Games held on the altar of Zeus which was situated almost in the centre of *Altis*. In order to study these rules, athletes were foregathered at Olympia several weeks before the competitions started; this oath was all the more solemn owing to the fact that it was made to the priests of Zeus themselves.

But Baron de Coubertin also knew that the Greeks fully realized that this Olympic oath was inadequate since they imposed 'Fines' or penalties in the form of 'zanes' which were costly statues, made of precious material, so expensive to those who infringed the sacred rules, that, in order to pay for these statues, the guilty athlete had to be assisted by his family, even by his native place in some cases!

And yet!... in the 'sacred grove' of the *Altis*, where the cities offered their precious gifts to the temple of Zeus, quite close to the covered way leading to the Stadium situated near by (obviously as a last reminder to those who took part in the Games), a few dozen stones piled side by side are still to be seen: these were the plinths of the 'zanes', reminders of the punishment inflicted on the delinquent athletes!

When shall we see the restoration of the 'zanes'?...