



*On January 1st, 1963,
Commemoration
of*

the Centenary of the Birth of Baron Pierre de Coubertin

Pierre de Fredi, Baron de Coubertin, was born in Paris on January 1st, 1863, and died at Geneva on September 2nd, 1937.

It is a very difficult task to summarize in a few words as active a life and extensive a work as that of Baron de Coubertin.

Very early in life he showed a taste for the study of literature, history, and the problems of education and sociology. Giving up the army to which he seemed to be called by family tradition, renouncing also the political career that was open to him, Pierre de Coubertin, at the age of twenty-four, decided to promote a vast movement of educational reform, and, at twenty-five, his work was started, the first formulae set and the preliminary moves achieved. In fact, he had by then already submitted to the Society for the Advancement of the Sciences a number of papers on methods of teaching.

In 1889, at the age of twenty-six, he first had his idea of reviving the Olympic Games, which had been abolished in 394 A.D., apparently for ever. For four years, he worked unceasingly to prepare opinion in England, the United States, and France for this revival. At last, on November 25, 1892, during a conference at the Sorbonne, he suggested that the Olympic Games, after a lapse of fifteen centuries, be revived in a modern and international form.

His suggestion was accepted at an international congress on sport that was summoned in 1894 at the same Sorbonne in Paris. Twelve nations were represented, including the United States and England, countries in which the practice of sport was already well developed, and without whose support no such movement of an international character could have been contemplated. During this congress, which lasted eight days, Baron de Coubertin imparted his enthusiasm so forcefully to all those present, that the decision to revive the Olympic Games and to hold them every fourth year, in different countries in turn, was unanimous. A committee (the International Olympic Committee) was formed to look after their development and well-being. Two years later, in 1896, the first Olympic Games of the modern cycle were celebrated in the rebuilt stadium of Athens. The triumphal chariot had been set in motion, and these contests have been held, at four-year intervals, with ever increasing success (except when prevented by war. Later, again following the suggestion of the Baron de Coubertin, a special cycle of Winter Games was instituted and initiated at Chamonix in 1924.

Everyone knows the history of the Games, but what is generally overlooked is the ceaseless labour, the tenacity and the perseverance which the Baron de Coubertin was

forced to exert in order to realize, accomplish and perfect this vast and important work. It is to him that we owe the whole of the main organization of the Olympic Games which benefited from his methodical and precise mind and from his wide understanding of the aspirations and needs of youth. He was, in fact, for many years, the sole director and so shaped the form and character of the Games. The rules and regulations, and the athlete's oath, came from him, as well as the basic arrangement of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. In addition, until 1925, he personally presided over the International Olympic Committee and assumed single-handed all the administrative and financial duties connected with this important position.

At present, all nations and races are interested and participate in the quadrennial Games. Thanks largely to Baron de Coubertin, the practice of physical education and sport has become popular in all continents throughout the world, influencing the habits and ways of living with beneficial effect on public health. Therefore it can truly be said that he accomplished a highly humanitarian and social work and may be counted among the great benefactors of mankind. The title of Honorary President of the Olympic Games, which will never be awarded again, was given to him in 1925, when he

retired from the Presidency of the International Olympic Committee. It was a well-deserved reward for his outstanding activities and efforts during over thirty years at the head of his Committee.

The revival of the Olympic Games is only a small part of Baron de Coubertin's work. In addition to numerous publications dedicated to the technique and the teaching of sport, he was the author of important historical studies, which include a remarkable four-volume universal history, as well as numerous notes, studies and pamphlets on politics, sociology, general teaching, the reform of education, etc. His works total over sixty thousand pages and the catalogue of his publications fills a fourteen-page printed booklet. Counted among the eminent historians of his time, he was a great educator and sociologist as well.

The work of Baron de Coubertin was above all a work of peace and one which will always remain fruitful. His memory will live throughout the world. His body rests in the cemetery of Bois-de-Vaux at Lausanne, Switzerland, where he resided and which became the headquarters of the International Olympic Committee in 1915. In accordance with his will, his heart was buried at Olympia, Greece, in the marble monument commemorating the revival of the Olympic Games.