

The Future of the Olympic Movement

Before looking into the future, let us briefly recall the past. I shall not allude to the Games of Antiquity, a subject now familiar to most of our readers. They say story repeats itself. Fortunately it was not the case with regard to Olympism which was condemned by a decree signed by Emperor Theodosius in Milan in the year 393 A.D. As a matter of fact, when Rome reigned over the Hellenic people, the decline of the Greek Empire was not long in bringing about the ruin of the Olympic Games which were one of the finest institutions of antiquity. The contestants began to despise winning events for glory sake and soon turned towards more substantial rewards. The moral degradation of the olympic ideal soon caused the decadence of the Games which had been one of the glory of the past.

Faced as we are today by the much controversial problem of modern amateurism versus professionalism, is it not possible that, owing to the very materialistic world, we live in at the present time, we may fall in the same decadence? Is there no danger that ancient history may repeat itself?

*

When dealing with a past fairly near our epoch and which still belongs to our century, I cannot help recalling to mind some of the concepts of Baron de Coubertin who revived the Games of our modern era and who left us such a rich legacy and yet at the same time such a heavy burden. A burden which becomes heavier everyday owing to the complexity, of the problems which assail us from every quarter and which, do not forget, make the case which we have been faced with today even more tragic as we have reached today a turning point in the history of Olympism. We must either go one believing in it or give it up.

*

So institution remains indestructible for a period of thousand years without being submitted to alteration or deterioration; and nothing is more thrilling as studying the evolution of sport in ancient times. The natural evolution is shown plainly. As soon as success has been reached it breaks up in communications and specialization creeping in, which soon leads on to professionalism and corruption. The spirit of fair-play, this 'aïdos' which, according to Pindare, has one avowed enemy: the thirst for profit, is soon exposed to the worst perils. We are faced today with the same perils which happened in Antiquity. We must at all cost defend

the Games and stop them from becoming a vast fair where muscles are the chief objects, help to prevent all ostentation of spectacular display, record breaking and spectacular manifestation of cranks and oddities as we so often witness nowadays. It is so sad to see that people, who pay dearly for their seats in the stadium, crave for more novelty and sensational shows, they actually clamour for them! Let us hope that we are not likely to witness the gladiators fights of long ago. The first of those bloodthirsty fights took place in Rome, if I am not mistaken, in 490 A.D. Eight centuries later, saint Augustin wrote in his *Confessions* the following 'As soon as he saw the blood flowing, he thirst for more blood and fell in extacy of sensual pleasure and sheer delight.' Nowadays the most we can expect is to see senators stepping down the arena (Stadium these days) and that, as in ancient days, when even an Emperor did so in order to receive the glamorous acclamations of the delirious crowds. But we are not deceived and we detect today the same failing and thirst for glory when some politicians snatch at every success won in the sporting field and Olympism for their own glorification! Are we not witnessing today the deplorable influence of politics wanting to seize the levers controlled by sport and Olympism which are the sole prerogative of the National Olympic Committees and of the leaders of the International Sport Federations?

*

Pierre de Coubertin, this great humanist of our modern times, created the genuine universal gathering, according to his words of *all Games and all Nations*. According to the Renovator, the Games should be a joyous festival of the youth of the world but run on aesthetic lines. The Games must not merely be a temporary confrontation of national champions. The universal character of sports must be preserved in the unity of civilization. After the first celebration of the Games in Athens, in 1896, de Coubertin realized that sport had to be run in relationship with Fine Arts and that the Olympic sports programme had to be enhanced by new spiritual values for the benefit of both spectators and participants. Rome did this in 1960 when staging the Games of the XVIIth Olympiad. It organized the most outstanding 'sport' cultural Exhibition ever seen at the celebrations of the Games of the Modern Era. But how many athletes availed themselves of the opportunity to visit this magnificent exhibition organized with such

painstaking trouble by the Organizing Committee at the E.U.R.? How many troubled to do so, I wonder, barely an average of 5% perhaps? Of course the 'chefs de mission' of foreign delegations had to give the example by showing some interest in this exhibition themselves. Here again is a sure sign of the human decadence of our times when Rome realized a superhuman effort in order to set up an Exhibition, not only for the benefit of the spectators, but also for the amateurs of Fine Arts although chiefly for the benefit of the young contestants. It is sad to say that, for some sport leaders, their conception of ART IN SPORT consisted in the gaining of 6/10th of a second in the 100 m. between 1900 to 1960. This is the conception of modern art as conceived by some sports leaders.

*

The ideal and future of the Olympic Movement must be protected. When I say this I recall what de Coubertin stated in Prague in 1925, when he submitted his resignation from his presidency, functions he exercised during a period of twenty-five years within the International Olympic Committee. — He uttered a thought which is so true that it could be a topical actuality, when he said: 'The organization of the Games must be run on simple lines, back to reason calm and serenity with less festivities... Fair or Temple, it is up to you sportsmen to make your choice. He enjoined the athletes to CHOOSE.

What he said thirty-six years ago is more than true today if we wish to preserve Olympism.

Without this leading factor, the Olympic Movement does not follow its course. We discovered that today when the Olympic spirit is attained. It is hard to see facts in their true light. Olympism has now been attained but it suffers from a certain slackness and lack of determinations far as enforcing the concepts and ideals conceived by de Coubertin. These form the foundations of all culture and civilization. The passive resistance used to fight the invading corruptive professionalism or pseudo-amateurism are sure signs of this observation. How, the Olympic idea remains a desire to strive after an ideal. How many of us still have this ideal?

*

What is the danger which threatens the Olympic Movement? First of all, corruption of a certain section of the youth of the present time, State controlled Amateurism, and professionalism: all these factors must ineluctably give the death blow to Olympism and its principles. We are told we must move with the time. This is right, but despite it all, there is an abyss between abandoning all principles which are sacred to us and we cannot bring ourselves to take the plunge! Mr. Brundage, the President of the International Olympic Committee, is

known as the apostle of integral amateurism, stated that in his youth being without means, he worked in order to pay his studies and not withstanding this fact he found time to become the champion No. 1 of the United States. He was also member of the U.S.A. Olympic team selected to compete in the decathlon at the Stockholm Games in 1912. People tells us that what was possible in these days is no more possible in our times. Too much is expected of the athlete. 'This is the source of ail evil.' Too much is asked of him who no more goes in for sport solely for pleasure but misuses sport for his own personal prestige... and his wallet!

*

The International Olympic Committee is asked to revise its rules on amateurism which, according to public opinion, are out of date! Why? BECAUSE THEY ARE VIOLATED. One is not playing the game, one is cheating. But it is not because a criminal commits a crime that the legislative jurisdiction of a country has to be altered or made more lenient! Nor would it be sensible to revise the rules of amateurism and to make them more lenient because a sham-amateur has been clever enough to sneak in the Olympics. Pascal said: 'Why give the body of Jesus-Christ to people who do not repent and go on sinning?'

*

There is another danger threatening Olympism: it is the overloading of the programme. One objected to the gigantic scale of the Games in Rome: but to be fair, Rome fulfilled the commitments imposed by the International Olympic Committee. The Organizing Committee discharged its duties to the entire satisfaction of the International Olympic Committee as well as to all who had the privilege to attend these Games. If there was a tendency to gigantism, it is the duty of the responsible parties (the International Olympic Committee and the international Federations) to put the trouble right. But how? There is already a talk that Tokyo is wanting to outdo Rome in splendour according to the latest information received and made by a responsible party of the 1964 Games. Also the international Olympic Committee has added two new sports on the programme!

In our opinion, we consider that the programme is overloaded. This is one of the plague threatening Olympism. Some of the professional sports should be abolished. The games have assumed such enormous proportions that the true qualities of amateur sportsmen are not put forward as they used to be. The press, you may be sure, profits by this state of affairs but the Games of today are not true reflection of what they should be, according to the notion of the cultured world. The olympic ideal is a man's inspiration to reach a higher level of character attainment. Failing to reach this

object, means that the Olympic festivals will vanish in smoke and in uproar ! 'Fair or Temple' : make your choice!

*

I have no wish to appear pessimistic, but as I happen to be placed right in the midst of world Olympic organization, I am able to watch and see the problem at close quarters and I can gauge all its pitfalls. Some of them offer serious difficulties. I have just referred to them before, they consist in "too large expansion of the Olympics, political infiltration in sport, I would go as far as mention on MILITARY infiltration, as practised in some countries of South and Central America, however surprizing as this may seem, I now refer to pseudo-amateurism. I exempt the professional who acknowledges himself to be so and is therefore blameless. He does not profess to go in for sport for recreation but adopts sport as a worthy profession as good as any other. He is hottest about it and often more honest than the psuedo-amateur who takes money on the sly...

*

As far as the International Olympic Committee is concerned, try to get the right idea of its activities. The fact that it is a permanent and autonomous organization has put it in a position to achieve big things. At the beginning, it created the international federations which were non-existent or practically so in 1894 when there were only two. Later on, the International Olympic Committee gave them the full and independent control of all technical problems. One must remember that the International Olympic Committee is only the 'trustee' of the olympic idea. It does not want the Olympic idea to become a source of anxiety, although the last point is unfortunately the least understood these days when the progress of material civilization, I would almost say the concept of atomic civilization, are in the way of putting everything out of perspective and proportion.

*

However, on several occasions peevish or unkind people have been running down and predicting the decline of the Olympic Games. They have been wrong on each occasion. The Games are drawing bigger crowds more and more, the press prances with joy at anticipating news, the politicians evince a growing interest and are very different from the days gone by when a French Minister told de Coubertin: 'The French Government is not interested in the Games.' Today, what do the same ministers have to say? Now that they realize that sport has -inspired our epoch in the same way that the nuclear and spatial discoveries have taken such a hold on people of any social milieu, and that sport has become part of our daily life, become the subject of all conversation

to such an extent that even the die-hards politicians begin to awake to its influence.

For the last ten years they put in an appearance in the tribunes of the stadia whereas in the olden times, these same parliamentarians were satisfied with presiding at agricultural shows, or tobacconists banquets or preside at some local concerts! (I do not generalize of course.)

*

Olympism has reached such prodigious prestige that it now realizes in another spheres what the United Nations fail to obtain. Olympism *is alive* and will go on living. But it lies within our power and that of all sports lovers to keep it alive. It survived two world wars and there are three world organizations only which have had this honour. The reason of this survival is due to the fact that they are built front high to low and not on a too democratic basis from low to high. These permanent institutions are the International Red Cross, the Olympic Movement and the... Vatican ! Olympism will survive social upheavals. It has nothing to fear from the actual tendencies of Trade-Unions. In 1928, de Coubertin declared : 'I am overjoyed to see working class institutions adopting the Olympic ideal with such an enthusiasm.'

*

If we wish to retain this existing quality of purity of the Olympic ideal, we must cultivate disinterested sport or games which are practised solely for pleasure and development of the moral character. What hurts me is to hear honest people affirm that hypocrisy is necessary and that Amateurs break rules just in the same way that unfaithful husbands do ! The passion for money threatens to poison everybody to the core. Modern sport is bound to turn to prostitution. Here ties the chief danger, but Olympism has no right to be a party to such sordid means used, I am sorry to say, by some national olympic committees and sports traders who bid for a short-lived glory, or nationalistic temporary prestige. How do these people contribute to maintain the ideal of sport? What means do they use in order to stop healthy young men front entertaining a delusive image of the so-called easy life brought up by the sports achievements they may attained? I have in mind some unhappy sick champions or sad forgotten champions out of work who are declassés when out of charity they are remembered and even so...

*

One must have the sad courage to disclose the truth concerning Olympism. The Games which were created to glorify amateur sport have become a convenient springboard leading to professional sport. It is superfluous for the to go on quoting cases... We must fight down this abusive use of Olympism and

go on doing so if we wish the Games to endure. The Olympic spirit must not be a source of inspiration for us during a fortnight only every fourth year ! It must be a source of daily inspiration to the amateur sportsman to practise his sport.

*

The Olympic Games have no other mission in our modern world beyond that of instilling this spirit in the whole of sports life as well as the national and international lives. Let us remember that when the games were created, it was not for a World championship nor a Fair of muscular display, but one of the main objects of the Olympics is to inspire international goodwill, build up character and lastly to be a festival for the youths on an universal scale. If we endeavour to retain this spirit in the future, Olympism is running no danger but it lies with YOU SPORT LEADERS to keep watching,

believe me the struggle is constant and never-ending !

*

The Flame of Rome went out in 1960. For some, it symbolized the triumph of muscles and nerves whilst enjoying wholesome competitive sport. For others, it meant a wrestling fair or display of sham-amateurism, nationalistic protagonistic encounters even some prestigious business concerns... Some misinformed people said that not knowing the large deficit incurred. Publicity on a huge scale perhaps, yet Rome, the Eternal City, did not need it... Why then ?

Because the Olympic Games do inspire the universe and will go on doing so, but for the future of Olympism, the problem remains : FAIR OR TEMPLE. You must choose. Everything depends on that choice.

O. M.