

## OLYMPISM IN OUR TIME

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*The influential Swiss paper, the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", recently published an article by the Head of the Swiss Federal Military Department, Mr. Arnold KAECH, entitled: "Olympia in our Time". This eloquent defence of Olympism deserved being repeated for the benefit of our readers :*

The tenth of a second that separated Hannes KOHLEMAINEN, winner of the 5000 metre race at the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, from his rival who came second, the Frenchman Jean BOUIN, represents the most important particle of time in the history of Finland. The name of this runner, from a little known Nordic country, which was at the time an independent frontier province of the Russian Empire, resounded round the world. As did the name of his country: Finland or Suomi. At that precise moment, millions of people suddenly became aware of the existence of this country of a thousand lakes, of the quiet and proud Finnish people, as if they had just emerged from the limbo of a vague imagination.

For several reasons, Finland and its people deserve to be known and admired. The Olympic glory of its incomparable runners, whose precursors were KOHLEMAINEN and the very famous Paava NURMI, shed a new light on this ancient people who had just recovered a new freedom.

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In the happy days preceding the first world war, 3282 athletes gathered together in Stockholm. Twenty-seven countries were represented. In Mexico, no fewer than 7886 competitors took part, while the number of countries had risen to 108. But what constitutes a revolution in itself is that the Games are eagerly followed today not only by the crowds who throng into the stadiums but also by the millions of television viewers who, thanks to satellite relay stations can share the drama of victory or defeat, can watch the extreme concentration of the athlete, the thrill of perfection and the disappointment of failure.

What nobility emanates from the young and colourful team captured by the camera on the track, in their boats or in the swimming pools ! Which is more to be admired - the elegant, vigorous and rapid thrust of the fencer or the virile, violent exchange of blows in the ring ? What is more moving than the bowed head of an athlete overwhelmed by his Olympic victory ?

To be one of these eight thousand represents a very high distinction.

It is an exclusive and yet at the same time an open society. It pays no heed to the origin, colour or social standing of those taking part. The only common proving ground is the contest. There is not one of them who has not trained hard for years or who has not pitted his skill successfully against the best in his country. This society is made up of great and small: kings, knights and squires. But the titles of nobility are not hereditary. They are won in the arena. They have to be merited in preliminary competitions, fiercely fought heats and finally in the supreme contest. No right is granted by privilege. It is a case of "Hic Rhodos hic salta". Everyone is familiar with, no one is unaware of this rule. And everyone knows the price of participation and victory.

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Is the price too high ? Are the untiring dedication and effort made again and again to the extreme limits of resistance justified ? Is the work accomplished day after day worth while ? Is there any justification in foregoing the pleasures of life, even if only temporarily, simply for victory ?

In "*The Green Hills of Africa*", Ernest HEMINGWAY described as follows his meeting with some Masai warriors : "They were the tallest, the slimmest men I had ever met; they all looked gay and cheerful. When we finally left, they started to run alongside our car. Happily laughing ! See how easy it is for us to keep up with you ! We drove faster and faster along the winding course of the river; the run turned into a race. One by one they dropped behind, with a smile and a wave of the hand. Only two athletes the best of the group, were still running by our side. With their long strides, they followed us at an easy, flowing pace; they radiated pride."

Today, the "black warriors" no longer run only on the green hills-of Africa, but also on the Olympic tracks. KEINO, TEMU, WOLDE . . . For a short while. their glory raises their country to the level of the greatest, those who have arrived. Their pride shines out over the continents and the seas and gladdens the hearts of their compatriots.

What price could be too high ? And what price can be put on the medals won by the wrestlers of far-off Mongolia or how can one estimate the importance of Mohamed GAMMOUDI's victory for the youth of his country ?

How can one calculate the value for an athlete of getting to know a foreign country, both ancient and modern, both familiar and unknown, which amalgamates and integrates like Mexico ?

What is more important in the world today than the meeting of young people in sport and competitions governed by the same rules of fraternity and equality ?

Where can the powerful and the humble, the boys and girls of the old world and the new meet on an equal footing with equal chances ?

And yet there are some who suggest that the price of the victories won at the Olympic Games as well as the price of participating in them is too high !

What a mercenary attitude !

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