
THE REVEREND FATHER DIDON

March 13th next will mark the seventieth anniversary of the death of the Reverend Father DIDON. Who among today's young athletes knows anything about the man to whom above all we owe the I.O.C.'s motto?



That is why, for a few moments, we should like to remind you once again of Henri DIDON, who was born in 1840, in the valley of Grésivaudan, so dear to that great French writer Stendhal.

A preacher and a writer, this Dominican friar soon became engrossed in his work as a teacher at Arcueil School, of which he was appointed prior in 1890

A liberal and a democrat, he was one of the first teachers in France to attach great importance to physical exercise. Shortly before his death, he visited some of the famous English public schools and, like Coubertin before him, was amazed by the English methods of education; enthusiastically, in words that have lost none of their topicality, he wrote: *"School life is absolutely the opposite in that country from school life here. They help to emancipate their pupils, we confine them."*

In a speech to his students at Arcueil, grouped before him by sports clubs on the day of their first assembly, he said, in tones ringing with emotion, his words punctuated by the flapping of his white gown: *"Here is your motto: Citius, Altius, Fortius! Ever Faster, Higher, Stronger,"*

In 1897, Pierre de Coubertin invited him to speak at the second Olympic Congress which he had convened at Le Havre. During these meetings, the Reverend Father DIDON submitted the following motion which was unanimously adopted:

"The Congress considers that the necessary development of games in educational establishments should be left to the initiative of the students, that these games should not be organized by specialized teachers and that the various sports associations should be freely formed, freely administered, under the friendly eye of the authorities and the guidance of the teaching staff."

Here are a few extracts from the speech he made at this congress, under the title: "Moral effects of athletic sports."

"... And you will not contradict me, Ladies and Gentlemen, when I say that we must recognize in P. de COUBERTIN, the reviver, the vigorous, indefatigable promoter of open-air exercise and athletics in France..."

"... I should have accomplished something worthwhile if I could prove irrefutably so as to convince even the most reluctant, that this educational power, this moral force contained in physical exercise in the open air is definitely beneficial and has a powerful effect on young people..."

"... The results achieved by the continual and regular practice of open-air exercise and athletics are numerous: I shall stress the main ones:

... The first is the development and proliferation of physical activity".

... The second is the spirit of competition and struggle.

... The third consists in giving strength and endurance.

... To complete those results of a moral and psychic nature, I shall call your attention to another of a civic nature. Sport, by grouping young people in an activity satisfying their nature, their need for movement, helps

to make them complete and paves the way for a proper school spirit."

"Let the sports associations then raise the flag of stendfastness on matters of honour and, when they enter a domain where compromise is rife, let them win the battle with an indestructible conscience against weak, wavering consciences, for the former also win political battles much more easily than the latter".

". . . We fight the fight as we think we should, but we are all fighting for the same cause. We present our sword in token of friendship, like the knights. We must never attack a knight, a champion of right and independence: we start negotiating with him but we avoid waging war against him, for to attack him is to take up arms against justice and freedom..."

. . . To win victories in life, we need real strength, practical strength and we can acquire this only by exercise in the open air and athletics which strengthen the body, and temper the soul. . ."

M. B.

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