

THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT AND THE GAMES

CONFRONTED BY DRUGS AND THE DEGRADATION OF MAN

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F/ You know the title of this talk; I could just as easily have called it:

"THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT OR OLYMPISM, A NECESSARY ANTIDOTE OR AN EFFECTIVE BULWARK AGAINST A CERTAIN FORM OF HUMAN DECADENCE"

1/ - As everyone knows, forty million Frenchmen every day may, if they wish, read one or more newspapers of different political biases and different trends, but all, without exception, telling the same sorry tales of wars, bombardments, massacres, kidnappings, thefts, hold-ups, robberies, revolts, protests, acts of violence, revolutions and hijackings - as well as misdemeanours of all kinds, especially those involving drugs.

Such is the daily reading of adults but, unfortunately, also of the young. I deliberately refrain from mentioning certain specialised magazines devoted exclusively to reports of crimes of passion, punished or unpunished, and those that offer lurid illustrations and texts. Such reading matter cannot help affecting the young and having a harmful influence on them.

How could it be otherwise, especially as according to statistics five per cent of these young people occupy the limelight, making themselves conspicuous by their excessive behaviour, their unconventional way of life or their subversive attitudes.

2/ - Should we not rather employ a diametrically opposed policy, surrounding this minority with a wall of silence and training the spotlight instead on the vast majority of conscientious students, their work and achievements?

Today, our traditional values tend to be overthrown. Those that are put forward to replace them are often poorly expressed and little known, leaving part of our youth lost and bewildered, without providing any real solution for them.



Vice-President of the I.O.C. and as accomplished a horseman as an athlete or marksman, Comte de BEAUMONT recently gave the conference, principal extracts of which are published from page 205.

3/ - Everything today tends to drive our society into a frenzied chase after material progress, to which no end can be seen and which provides no answer to the profound aspirations of a mankind that seems to a certain extent to have lost its bearings.

Progress, yes, but what for? . . .

. . . Is this emphasis on material success not the cause of the great dissatisfaction and unrest that have led to the "Hippy" phenomenon, this mass of young people seeking lost innocence, the serenity of carefree children, searching facile pleasures free from all restraint? . . .

. . . Certain adults, too, feel less and less involved in a world which seems more and more at the mercy of the trends and opinions of the young, who today are one of the important factors not only of the intelligentsia, but of the world economy and international trade. . . .

. . . A new psychology, a totally different approach to life, old taboos fast disappearing, greater and greater freedom of morals, we are approaching a new fundamental revolution, that of the modern world, the first effects of which are appearing and developing in the United States - but which concern us too.

4/ - For let us not delude ourselves, we shall very soon be affected by the shock waves shaking America today.

. . . We are entering an era of great adventure, a new revolution. A scientific revolution with an alarming side to it, one might say. Why alarming? Because it is overshadowed by four very precise threats:

a/ - The possibility of overpopulation, since medical progress permits twice as many births as deaths. Will this overpopulation turn the world into a gigantic ant-heap impossible to live in?

b/ - The fear of an atomic cataclysm, the consequence of the discovery of nuclear power that casts its Apocalyptic shadow over the future of mankind.

c/ - The mass-media, which allow almost universal instantaneity of news, cause sweeping changes in economic structures, science, medicine, politics and sport (400 million and more sports fans watching the World Football Cup). The audio-visual field is becoming more and more widespread. Nothing happens in any part of our world without having immediate repercussions on the rest of the world.

d/ - Cybernetics opens up to us the era of computers and robots but, even so, cannot put an end to pollution of all kinds, as Commander COUSTAUD reminded us so terrifyingly in his last

talk before the Strasbourg Parliament. Nor is this era able to put an end to the conflicts between opposing ideologies draining man more and more of his vital spiritual substance.

. . . Even in France, in the Paris region alone, the increase in crime is becoming a more and more alarming problem: 70% growth in ten years and the rate is increasing. . . .

. . . Not only violence, but also drug addiction, is continually spreading. . . .

. . . In France, the problem of drugs is beginning to become more and more acute. . . .

. . . It would seem impossible to determine with any degree of certainty the start of this wave of drug-taking.

At the same time, the sporting spirit is ridiculed and scoffed at. . . .

. . . It is a well-known fact that drug-addicts are found neither in the stadia nor in the gymnasia. . . .

. . . In my opinion, youth must be guided from a very early age and given among other things an ideal, a love of sport, of healthy rivalry, and even more a desire to seek their own inner harmony, their own discipline by exerting their own will. It is here, I think, that Olympism must come into action.

A Frenchman, Pierre de COUBERTIN, the creator of the International Olympic Committee, had a presentiment of the dangers threatening the youth of the world in the twentieth century.

In spite of sarcasm, in spite of difficulties of all kinds, in the midst of almost general indifference, he revived the Olympic Games in 1896, and interest in these Games has grown and spread steadily ever since. In Antiquity, these Games had lasted over a thousand years, from 776 B.C. to 393 A.D., when the very Christian Emperor Theodosius, an enemy of paganism, whose glorification of physical health and cult of the body were bound up for him with the worship of heathen gods, abolished the Games by imperial edict.

But what exactly is Olympism? A definition may be made in a few very simple words: *It is respect for a certain moral code based on loyalty, disinterestedness, a respect for the rules, the acceptance of both victory and defeat. It is a state of grace, almost a religion, that has become a state of mind; it is also an attempt to establish the brotherhood of mankind through universal sports contests. It is men wishing to hold out their hands to each other in friendship across the frontiers.*

In order to understand properly the evolution of these Games, we shall have to stir the ashes of the past and make a veritable pilgrimage to the source.

First of all, how did the Games come into existence? From a race between four young men in commemoration of the death of King Augias, whom their own brother Hercules had slain. Or so legend has it. ...

... In order to commemorate this day, he called on his four brothers, organised a race on the banks of the River Alphaeus, which passes through Olympia, and crowned the victor with an olive branch. ...

... It would seem too that Zeus, the king of the Gods, had ordered the first Olympic Games to be held there in honour of the victory he had won over his father, Cronus.

The years passed, the Games were forgotten, until Pelops, who gave his name to the Peloponnesus, created new Games in 1360 B.C. ...

... They were said to be the first Olympic Games. However, they quickly fell into oblivion.

According to the French mission that carried out digs at Olympia at the end of the XIXth Century, the first date when the Olympic Games were held was 884 B.C. but, curiously, this date does not correspond to any of the historical facts to which Greek tales allude. On the other hand, we do know that a certain Coreobos won the Stadium Prize for a race over a distance of 192.27 m. in 776 B.C., a distance which might appear strange, until it is learned that it is supposed to correspond to 600 of Hercules' feet. ...

... The date of Coreobos' victory is in fact the oldest of the dates known with any precision in the annals of the Aryan peoples. This caused Pierre LOUYS to write: *"How is it that the Greeks dated their national era from this race, when the Romans counted their First Year from the foundation of Rome, the Christians from the birth of Christ, the Muslims from the start of Islam, the revolutionaries from the proclamation of the Republic?"* The Greeks have no idea in what year Troy was captured, nor when the Atrides lived, nor in which century Homer died, but they inscribe Coreobos' victory in white marble and bequeath it to posterity. They begin, therefore, to date their events from the day when the priests of Olympia carved this name on the tablet of honour. This demonstrates beautifully to what extent the Olympic Games were a solemn event for the Greeks, without any equivalent anywhere else in the world. ...

... The Olympic Games of Greek Antiquity represented, for the Greeks, a sum of generous impulses, religious festivals and popular celebrations, of which we have kept but a fragmentary aspect, deprived of its religious significance. ...

... The Games lasted six days - six days of truce, for during their preparation and until they ended, all business transactions and quarrels were suspended, even wars had a respite. This was the great truce of Olympism. ...

... But gradually, as one Olympiad succeeded the other, faith grew less until it was lost altogether. The Roman conquerors desecrated the temples. In 393, the edict of the Christian Emperor Theodosius dealt the Games their death blow.

... Then in 1827, a French traveller, caught by night in a sudden storm on the banks of the River Alphaeus, tied his horse to the branches of a centuries-old olive tree, and wrapping his cloak about him waited shivering for day to break, curled up beneath the branches. ...

... The sun, which often follows a storm in the Peloponnesus, shone that morning on the ruins as it rose.

The traveller continued his way on foot, his horse having bolted during the night. Following the course of the tumultuous torrent to the end of a small valley among the vines, the branches and crumbling walls, he came upon the torso of a statue emerging from the mists of time. A bust caked with earth, moss and roots. It was Praxiteles' fabulous statue of Hermes, the Messenger of the Gods, restored to the sun again like a subterranean river after centuries of sleep. The traveller took this precious relic back to Athens. He made a report on his find to the Academy of Sciences and advanced the theory that the place where this mutilated God had risen again might well be the site of the stadium of Olympia.

It was not until the end of the XIXth Century that the report by this French traveller was taken seriously - and not by his compatriots but ... by German archaeologists.

Today, the greater part of the stadium and the hippodrome of Olympia have been excavated and restored to the light of day. It is through the trees of this valley at the foot of Altis, that every four years since the revival of the Games a group of young Greek maidens, clad in embroidered chlamyses, have slowly made their way to light the ritual flame in the sacred wood. A flame that is carried across the whole world spreading its light and purity.

Divided into three zones, English, French and German, the excavations advanced at a terrific pace in 1894 and revealed fabulous treasures. That same year, in the great

amphitheatre of the Sorbonne, after ten years of effort and being a butt for sarcasm, an orator of small stature but great heart, Pierre de COUBERTIN announced to the representatives of the 14 countries assembled there the revival of the Olympic Games. ...

... Who was Pierre de COUBERTIN? Pierre Fredi, Baron de COUBERTIN was born in Paris on January 1st, 1863.

After brilliant studies at the Jesuit college in the rue de Madrid, he became a cadet at the great Military Academy of St. Cyr, then a student at the School of Political Sciences.

Passionately fond of history, he studied the lives of the Greek philosophers and was delighted to discover that the Ancients worshipped beauty and physical perfection. Very soon, he took up this cause enthusiastically and wrote:

"I shall rebronze (in the sense of casting in bronze) the sickly, flabby youth of today with their limited horizons; I shall rebronze their body and character through sport, with all its risks and even its excesses. This youth will become a powerful force for international peace. And all of this will be for everyone, without distinction as to birth, caste, wealth, position or position."

When he was 27, Pierre de COUBERTIN published two books: one dealing with education in England and the other with English education in France. It was the first stage of his activity. It was COUBERTIN too who was responsible for the spreading of sport throughout France.

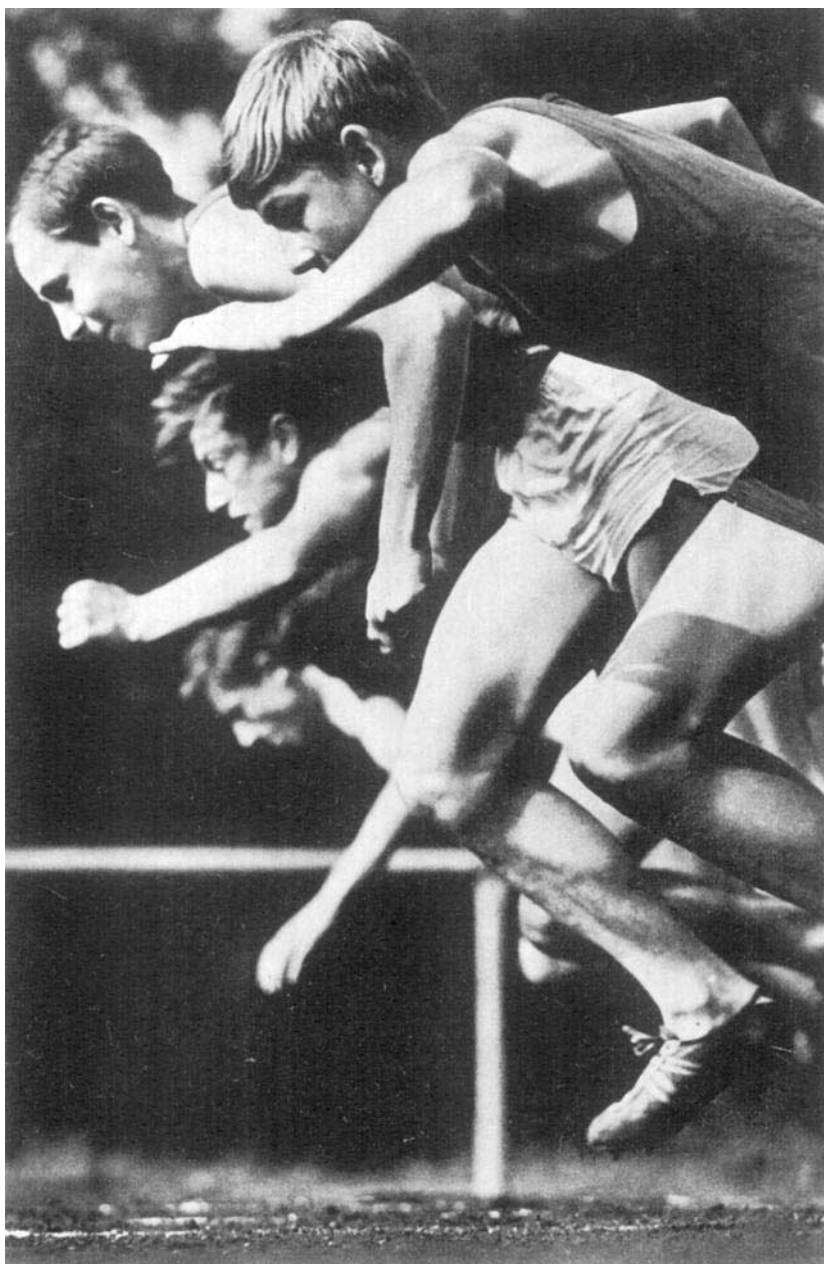
The Academician Jean GIRAUDOUX, when he was a student of 20 at the Ecole Normale and record holder for the 400m. straight dash, stated: *"Pierre de COUBERTIN is to the modern world what Apollo was to the Greek world."*

In 1896, the first Games of the modern era were held in Athens.

At the age of 33, when he was at his peak, COUBERTIN opened up to the world a new course for modern youth, thus effecting his ideal at the age when most men are still looking for their bearings.

In order to further the cause of Olympism, he did not hesitate to use all modern technical means. In 1935, in a broadcast message, COUBERTIN stressed five points about which he felt very strongly:

Firstly, modern Olympism is a form of religion; and secondly, Olympism presupposes an aristocracy of athletes.



He wrote: *"For 100 to take up physical training, 50 must go in for sport; for 50 to go in for sport, 20 must specialise; and for 20 to specialise, 5 must be capable of astonishing feats."*

He said too: *"An elite is not enough."* This elite must form an order of knighthood for whom fair play is the golden rule.

In addition, for him *"Olympism was to be a general truce in an atmosphere of peaceful rivalry"* and at the same time *"serve the cause of beauty". . . .*

. . . While 2000 years earlier Aristotle, the greatest philosopher of all time, had said: *"It is not a matter of training a body, or a wild beast, but a complete man capable of facing a noble danger"*; COUBERTIN, for his part, echoed him in writing: *"To my way of thinking, the real Olympic hero is the individual adult male athlete."* Without being a woman-hater, COUBERTIN was against feminine sport, which he considered a form of public exhibition. In his opinion, the Olympic Games should be reserved for men and in 1931 he forbade women from taking part in events in which men competed. *"Their rôle"* he said, *"should be limited to crowning the victors."*

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You have now, I hope, a fairly complete idea of the Olympic spirit and ideal symbolized by over 100 years of existence and the glimpses of the thoughts of Pierre de COUBERTIN, the reviver of the Games.

Furthermore, since it is obviously true that the stadia and gymnasiums are not the haunts of those who seek artificial paradises, the logical conclusion is that to defeat this growing scourge, we have only to encourage sport and at the same time promote the Olympic ideal and spirit. . . .

. . . The members of the French Olympic Committee have decided to create and hold French National Games, conceived according to the Olympic ideal. The French National Games will bring together a large section of the youth of France.

Every other year, over a million French boys and girls, mostly between the ages of 12 and 17, will compete in a series of heats at departmental and regional levels, until only about 2,500 are left for the finals, to be held in a big French town.

. . . The Presidents of the Federations are backing us in our venture. It is these volunteers in the cause of sport, who give us their time and wholehearted support, who constitute the French Olympic Committee. It is they who, in their Federations, assisted by their Committees, are unsparing in their

efforts and their advice. It is they who see to it that their respective sports continue to develop.

All these volunteers, all these men of goodwill, to whom I wish to express my unbounded admiration and feelings of gratitude, all wish to make the French National Games a success. ...

... I thank you for listening to me so patiently. You will undoubtedly, and I certainly hope so, be among those who will join forces with us to defend the cause of moderation and the harmony of man in the face of dangers that threaten those who seek artificial paradises through the use of drugs.



J. de B.