

The restoration of the Olympic Games and the immense work of organisation which it entailed represents only a minute portion of the work of Pierre de Coubertin. A historian by inclination and by family tradition, he published some major historical studies, among them his original and famous « *Histoire Universelle* ».

His publications devoted to the techniques and pedagogy of sport are numerous, as are his notes and pamphlets on politics and sociology, not to mention his speeches and improvisations. The works of the founder of modern Olympism, in their totality, amount to some sixty thousand pages. To mark the occasion of their publication in 1986, the *Olympic Review* is presenting a selection of texts, one every month, from the writings of this great thinker.

Although today we may find the style old-fashioned, the essential vitality of the thought remains. We have tried to give the widest possible glimpse of this mind, at once inventive and methodical in its precision, constantly attentive to the aspirations and needs of the young.



## SPORT AND THE ART OF AGEING

by *PIERRE DE COUBERTIN*

This is the time when a man can feel himself growing old... A number changes, the number the pen has been tracing on the paper for twelve months. A year draws to a close and the ever diminishing number of those left to enjoy begins to weigh on the mind... The occasion is a propitious one to reflect for a moment on the way sport can influence the individual and help him in the practice of this difficult and valuable art which has been described as the art of ageing.

On the way in which such an art is practised depends, in fact, the most important of consequences, namely the maintenance of harmonious contact between generations. I do not intend to go into the problems which arise for society as a result of the all too frequent absence of such contact. These problems amount to a situation where, instead of a continuous process of construction carried forward from generation to generation for the good of humanity, all kinds of small instances of destruction take place as a result of the impatience of the young, their need to react, the feeling they have of being misunderstood. It is natural that the architecture should change with the advent of a new generation, but the building should remain substantially the same, subject to an eternal process of perfection. If old people do not "know how to grow old", their inevitable injustice towards their successors causes all manner of disorders on the great construction site of mankind and the collective work is slowed down, hampered, sometimes even profoundly compromised.

To what should we turn as a means of maintaining this so desirable contact ? To religion ? The religion of the young and the old is never identical. It would even be unfortunate if it were. Their outlook on life makes it impossible. It is not the same... Patriotism may perhaps take the same intense and passionate form in both young

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and old but there is no comparison between their understanding and way of thinking. Occupations ? Obviously, they cannot have much in common.

No ! There are, in reality, only two possible points of contact, which are closely linked to one another if not interdependent, since *sport* is a great aid to *optimism*. It is optimism and sport — its greatest supplier — that create the moral unity of English manhood. Any country wishing to achieve a similar unity has a chance of success if it applies the same formula. However, that would certainly take 'time, at least the time it takes to educate thoroughly an entire generation.

Once a man can no longer practise sport himself (not as a result of age, since one would have to be very old indeed to be obliged to renounce it altogether, but as a consequence of accidents or illnesses that beset him along the way), there remains the active interest, the effective patronage which everyone has the chance to exercise in the sphere of sport. Such an interest is as normal and natural as the interest in sport of a young man who does not practise it is disagreeable and artificial. An interest of the latter kind is shocking and unattractive. How attractive, on the other hand, is the type of man who, having tasted all the joys of sport and drawn fine, well-balanced strength from this pure source, which circumstances now prevent him from approaching, gives the young people who follow and succeed him the double reinforcement of his experienced advice and a sort of extended camaraderie.

No doubt such contact contains an element of regret, but it is a healthy regret. Even when it is the object of regret, sport continues to enhance life. One who has been a keen sportsman retains the beneficial effect of sport for the rest of his life.

But what kind of sportsman are we talking about ? It must be made plain : the true sportsman and not the pale effigy, who is incapable of getting to the heart of the matter ; the snob who seeks in sport merely a means of attracting attention, of striking poses, wearing fancy clothes or making useful contacts, and is always outside our circle when we are talking sport. Such a man finds there no true joy or strength. How then can he find in it a formula for growing old in a manly and useful way ?

