



On 2nd September, 1937, Baron Pierre de Coubertin died of a heart attack while taking a walk in Park Lagrange in Geneva.

At seventy-four, he was still as alert in mind as in body and it is good to think that this active man was spared immobility and suffering which so often accompany long illness.

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of his death, and in remembrance of this great man, we have chosen to publish his appeal to young sportsmen in 1927, exactly forty years ago, the message of which is eternel and could be repeated today.

We are also printing a recent article by John A. Lucas who wrote a doctoral dissertation on the history of the Olympic Movement and a biography of its founder. This text shows the admiration Pierre de Coubertin had for his masters and the most fruitful use he made of their teaching.

## Baron de Coubertin and Thomas Arnold

by John A. Lucas, Associate Professor of Physical Education at the Pennsylvania State University

The figure of Dr. Thomas Arnold, D. D., headmaster of the Rugby School from 1828-1842, is one of the most important and least understood personalities in the evolution of the modern Olympic Games. Dr. Arnold was the single most important influence on the life and thought of Pierre de Coubertin. The Baron's philosophical approach to the many facets of his life combined the "wholeness" of the Grecian spirit of antiquity with the extreme nineteenth century moralism of Tho-

mas Arnold. Coubertin's concept of Grecian thought, exemplified in the trinity of "character, intellect, and body", was inexorably fused with the image of disciplined austerity and sportsmanship of the English Rugby School.

The aristocratic and impressionable young Coubertin came in contact with a phase of English society in 1875 at the age of twelve. He had read a French translation (by J. Girardin) of Thomas Hughes' English classic,

*Tom Brown's School Days*. The series had appeared in the *Journal de la Jeunesse* of that same year. After graduating from the Ecole des sciences politiques in 1883, the young Baron began a series of visits to England in order to acquaint himself more intimately with the life of the famed English public schools "in a desire to attach my name to a great pedagogical reform". \* He

\* Pierre de Coubertin, *Une Campagne de Vingt et Un Ans, 1887-1908* (Paris, Librairie de l'Education physique), page 2.

was convinced that the vigor, wealth and power of Great Britain was due primarily to its unique system of public education.

Thomas Arnold was the greatest, if not the first, of the English great head-masters. Arnold entrusted the government of the schools to the senior boys and the senior boys added a fourth item to Arnold's trio of ideals, (" first, religious and moral principle ;

in effecting Arnold's moral purpose. Because the reforms at Rugby under Dr. Arnold permeated the whole mass of schools in the 1840's and 1850's, so in the world of sport, the practices in vogue at Rugby tended to be copied in other schools. The natural love of exercise developed to the point where " the prestige of Greek fought a losing battle against the prestige of sport ".\*

Secondly, gentlemanly conduct ; thirdly, intellectuel ability "), placing it perhaps first on the list — namely, athletic proficiency secured through compulsory organized games.

Arnold's passionate attempt to " make boys freely functioning individuals " never led him to over-emphasize athletics. The impetus which produced the close organization and prestige of athletics came from the disciples of Arnold. To them, athletics seemed a useful instrument

If there are evils in an exaggerated modern athleticism, one cannot blame Arnold for them. His philosophy was to create a change in the climate of moral thinking among the boys — to substitute good interests for bad. Sports were one means of gaining this end. William Milligan Sloane, Professor of History at Princeton and Columbia, and charter member of the International

\* Dennis W. Brogan, *The English People - Impressions and Observations* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), page 26.



▲  
Pierre de Coubertin at the Stadium...  
... and at Olympia. ▶

Olympic Committee, stressed the importance of athletic games at Rugby when he said, "this new branch of pedagogy was never described as such... because sport is its own impulse, and the out-door life its own exceeding great reward".\*

In his study of the Rugby School, Pierre de Coubertin made a startling discovery. The Rugby School was, he surmised, not a boy's preparation for later life. *It was life itself*, an adult world in miniature. Nowhere in France could he find its counterpart. To the great Coubertin, the social and political life at Rugby School, i. e. the associations, newspapers, elective government, not only were impossible without the binding force of athletics, but were the creation of this force. Baron Pierre de Coubertin was convinced that the sports-centered English public school system of the late nineteenth century was the rock upon which the vast and majestic British Empire rested. In the recondite

scholarship of Dr. Arnold and in the ensuing trend toward manly sport at Rugby and in England, Coubertin saw a catharsis, not only for the English, but for Frenchmen and eventually all mankind.

The genius of Arnold had sown the seed. The genius of Coubertin responded. The latter's lifelong devotion to the Hellenic trinity of body, mind and spirit, coupled with a compelling faith in the character-building qualities of English sports education formed the rationale for his dream of universal amateur athletics. The guiding principle of this Olympic Movement, called "Olympism", was viewed by its creator as a pervasive religion, a cult of beauty and an instrument for world peace. The singular dedication of the idealistic Frenchman and those of his associates resulted in one of the most comprehensive organizations in social spheres — the international Olympic Movement. Had Thomas Arnold lived to see the first modern Olympic Games in 1896, he would have, I think, beamed his approval.

J. A. L.

