

ODE TO SPORT

by Pierre de Coubertin

I.

O Sport, delight of the Gods, distillation of life! In the grey dingle of modern existence, restless with barren toil, you suddenly appeared like the shining messenger of vanished ages, those ages when humanity could smile. And to the mountain tops came dawn's first glimmer, and sunbeams dappled the forest's gloomy floor.

II.

O Sport, you are Beauty! You - the architect of this house, the human body, which may become object or sublime according as to whether it is defiled by base passions or cherished with wholesome endeavour. There can be no beauty without poise and proportion, and you are the incomparable master of both, for you create harmony, you fill movement with rhythm, you make strength gracious, and you lend power to supple things.

III.

O Sport, you are Justice! The perfect fairness which men seek in vain in their social institutions rises around you of its own accord. No man can surpass by one centimetre the height he can jump or the time for which he can run. His combined strength of body and mind alone set the bounds to his success.

IV.

O Sport, you are Daring! The whole meaning of muscular effort lies in one word - to dare. What good are muscles, what good is it to feel nimble and strong and to train one's nimbleness and strength if not to dare? But the daring you inspire is far from the rashness which impels the gambler to stake his all on a throw. It is a prudent and considered daring.

V.

O Sport, you are Honour! The titles you bestow are worthless save if won in absolute fairness and perfect unselfishness. Whoever succeeds in deceiving his fellows by some ignoble trick, suffers the shame of it in the depths of himself and dreads the dishonourable epithet which will be coupled with his name if the fraud from which he prospers should come to light.

VI.

O Sport, you are Joy! At your call the flesh makes holiday and the eyes smile; the blood flows free and strong in the arteries. Thought's horizon grows lighter and more clear. Even to the griefstricken you can bring a healing distraction from their sorrows, while you enable the happy to taste the joy of living to the full.

VII.

O Sport, you are Fecundity! You tend by straight and noble paths towards a more perfect race, blasting the seeds of sickness and righting the flaws which threaten its needful soundness. And you quicken within the athlete the wish to see growing about him brisk and sturdy sons to follow him in the arena and in their turn bear off joyous laurels.

VIII.

O Sport, you are Progress! To serve you well, man must better himself in body and in soul. You enjoin him to observe a loftier hygiene; you require him refrain from all excess. You teach him wise roles which will give his effort the maximum intensity without impairing the balance of his health.

IX.

O Sport, you are Peace! You forge happy bonds between the peoples by drawing them together in reverence for strength which is controlled, organised and self-disciplined. Through you the young of all the world learn to respect one another, and thus the diversity of national traits becomes a source of generous and peaceful emulation.

* English translation taken from COUBERTIN, Pierre, *The Olympic Idea. Discourses and Essays*, ed. by Carl-Diem-Institut, Cologne 1966, pp. 39-40.