

THE PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY

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THE OLYMPIC GAMES

DEAR FRIENDS:



Los Angeles, California hosted the Summer Olympic Games for 1984. The facilities of the area were sufficient, and the various competitions were scattered about over a considerable part of Southern California. For the most part, an excellent spirit of sportsmanship prevailed, and the various countries maintained a friendly and wholesome relationship. The opening ceremonies showed considerable Hollywood influence. They were super-colossal with emphasis upon folk dancing and genuine evidences of fellowship. Choral events were well handled, musical numbers appropriate to the occasion, and dance ensembles attractive and in good taste.

It should be remembered that the Olympiad was originally a sacred festival to honor mighty Zeus and his companion divinities. In one sense, it was a joyous occasion expressing the gratitude of humankind for the benevolence of the creating deities. It was also a testimony to the virtues and courageous convictions of mortals who owed everything to the benevolence of providence. According to available statistics, the Olympic games were first held in the vicinity of Athens about 776 B.C. Athletics were not exactly stressed. The entire exhibit consisted of one foot-race the length of the stadium. The games lasted for only one day, and most of the time was taken up in congratulations, discourses, poems, and religious rites. The winners were likely to have a poem written in their honor by someone of the quality of Pindar. The victorious sprinter was winned and dined and in some cases at least statues were erected in his honor.

Early in the games, it was decreed that all warfare, revolution, or violence must be suspended for the duration of the festival, and those journeying from a distance should travel in safety. Political complications were strictly forbidden, and the games were never to be involved in the disputes of nations or internecine strife. The programs were never to be exploited in any way, and the rewards were never in money or to advance private



Judge crowning a victorious youth.
R. F. Vase-painting
in the Louvre Collection, Paris.

purposes. As the reputation of the games spread, visitors came from everywhere and were always treated as honored guests. There were no admission charges to the games. Women did not participate in the Olympic games, but had a similar athletic event of their own. Young women might attend the Olympics, but not compete.

In time, the duration of the Olympiads was extended to provide time for a wide variety of athletic sports from archery to chariot racing. There was a special section for the judges and the priestly supervisors, and all involved in deciding the winners of the various events had to take an oath of integrity before the altar which stood within the arena. Even in the early days, however, some local cynics depreciated the various events. A friend on the way to the arena passed a philosopher going in the opposite direction. When asked if he was planning to attend, the wise man shook his head emphatically. The acquaintance then asked, "Do you not wish to see men as strong as oxen, as swift as deer, and who can swim faster than fishes?" The philosopher shook his head again, and replied, "I am not interested in men copying the skills of beasts, but if great teachers will deliver orations, poets compose immortal verse, scientists discuss their inventions, and astronomers discuss the motions of the heavens, I will be in the front row."

Although there is a question as to whether there were any stone seats except those for the priests and judges, a rather skeptical father asked the sophist who was the teacher of his only son as to what advantage wisdom could bestow. The sophist replied, "If I educate your son and he should attend the Olympic games, you will not see one rock sitting on another."

The Olympic games were officially closed in 395 A.D. by the Roman Emperor Theodosius I. His decision was partly dominated by the event by which Rome had become a Christian country and partly by the circumstance that Roman patricians were not fond of physical exercise. There was then a long period of time until the Olympiads were revived by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a French educator and scholar. It was fitting therefore that the first modern Olympiad should be held in Greece where special stadiums were constructed for it in 1896. Unfortunately, while the purpose was meritorious, the new Olympiads were a birth out of time. The world had changed greatly, the old religious morality was fading away, and it was impossible to restore the spiritual overtones which protected the original games for nearly a thousand years. It was no longer possible to proclaim world peace for those days set aside every four years for this international celebration. It was interrupted by World War I and II. The new Olympiads have become essentially athletic events for participation in skill of one type or another.

It is probable that the modern world, much concerned with athletics, will appreciate the various competitions of skill. Something can also be said for the young people who have placed themselves under discipline in order to compete for the various awards do develop respect for each others achievements. It is evident, however, that

the games cannot fulfill their real purpose unless there is a basic friendliness and respect between the representatives of the various participating countries. In watching some of the programs on television, it seemed to me that a greater goodwill was evident among the contestants. They are mostly young, and have not been completely indoctrinated into the conflicting groups which are endangering world peace. Thus, the games do serve a useful purpose, and it may well be that the fine looking young men and women participating in the various sports will help to redeem the constructive relationships which the Olympic games were intended to inspire.

It is also noticeable that public opinion is opposed in general to the exploitation of the Olympic games. The effort to make a quick profit by exorbitant charges imposed upon visitors has made a considerable impression on public minds. Efforts to make exorbitant profits entirely contrary in spirit to the original intention of this great sports event have been a dismal failure. This fact has also been well disseminated through the media. Some will say, "Why sports at all?" The answer seems obvious to me. They emphasize the importance of self-discipline, clean living, and patient dedication to maintaining the physical body in the best possible condition. They are a line of defense against the intemperances which have become a serious threat to the younger generation. If they have a little success as the result of winning a medal, they will at least have earned it in a time when people in general prefer to enjoy honors, wealth, and recognition without any effort to improve their own characters or abilities.

I attended the opening ceremonies of the Olympic games held in Los Angeles in 1932. They were held in the same Coliseum, but the seating capacity was not as great as it is now. The games were opened by the Vice-President of the United States, and the various countries marched around the field in closely knit groups. There was no great fanfare and there were fewer events, and the complete competition of sports was held in the vicinity of the Coliseum. It was on this occasion that the first Olympic village was constructed for the benefit of the participants. To look back on those days and compare them to the 1984 lavishness tells something about what has happened to the world in the last fifty years. The struggle for international understanding has not yet borne its fruit, for there were nations marching in 1932 which were not here in 1984. Some have ceased to exist and some stayed away for political reasons. It might have been different if modern leaders had united to pay homage to the Divine Powers upon which we all depend for present existence and future survival.

Always most sincerely,

Marly P. Hall

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

Andersen, Hans Christian	Eighty Fairy Tales	(P)	\$ 7.95
de Chardin, Pierre Teilhard	Hymn of the Universe	(P)	4.95
de Chardin, Pierre Teilhard	On Love & Happiness	(C)	9.95
Geber	Investigation or Search of Perfection	(P)	2.95
Golday, Adrienne	Rose and the Pickle	(C)	7.95
Isaacs, Thelma	Gemstones, Crystals & Healing	(P)	8.00
Levine, Stephen	Who Dies?	(P)	9.95
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O'Brien, Elmer (translation)	Essential Plotinus	(P)	4.50
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Purce, Jill	Mystic Spiral	(P)	10.95
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Stapleton, Laurence (Editor)	H.D. Thoreau: Writer's Journal	(P)	5.00
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Wambach, Helen	Reliving Past Lives	(P)	4.95

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