

Art and Sport

ODE TO SPORT *

I.
O Sport, pleasure of the Gods, essence of life, you appeared suddenly in the midst of the grey clearing which writhes with the drudgery of modern existence, like the radiant messenger of a past age, when mankind still smiled. And the glimmer of dawn lit up the mountain tops and flecks of light dotted the ground in the gloomy forests.

II.
O Sport, you are Beauty! You are the architect of that edifice which is the human body and which can become abject or sublime according to whether it is defiled by vile passions or improved through healthy exertion. There can be no beauty without balance and proportion, and you are the peerless master of both, for you create harmony, you give movements rhythm, you make strength graceful and you endow suppleness with power.

III.
O Sport, you are Justice! The perfect equity for which men strive in vain in their social institutions is your constant companion. No one can jump a centimetre higher than the height he can jump, nor run a minute longer than the length he can run. The limits of his success are determined solely by his own physical and moral strength.

IV.
O Sport, you are Audacity! The meaning of all muscular effort can be summed up in the word 'dare'. What good are muscles, what is the point of feeling strong and agile, and why work to improve one's agility and strength, unless it is in order to dare? But the daring you inspire has noth-

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ing in common with the adventurer's recklessness in staking everything on chance. Yours is a prudent, well-considered audacity.

V.
O Sport, you are Honour! The laurels you bestow have no value unless they have been won in absolute fairness and with perfect impartiality. He who, with some shameful trick, manages to deceive his fellow competitors feels guilt to his very core and lives in fear of the ignominious epithet which shall forever be attached to his name should his trickery be discovered.

VI.
O Sport, you are Joy! At your behest, flesh dances and eyes smile; blood races abundantly through the arter-

ies. Thoughts stretch out on a brighter, clearer horizon. To the sorrowful you can even bring salutary diversion from their distress, whilst the happy you enable fully to savour their *joie de vivre*.

VII.
O Sport, you are Fecundity! You strive directly and nobly towards perfection of the race, destroying unhealthy seed and correcting the flaws which threaten its essential purity. And you fill the athlete with a desire to see his sons grow up agile and strong around him to take his place in the arena and, in their turn, carry off the most glorious trophies.

VIII.
O Sport, you are Progress! To serve you, a man must improve himself both physically and spiritually. You force him to abide by a greater discipline; you demand that he avoid all excess. You teach him wise rules which allow him to exert himself with the maximum of intensity without compromising his good health.

IX.
O Sport, you are Peace! You promote happy relations between peoples, bringing them together in their shared devotion to a strength which is controlled, organized and self-disciplined. From you, the young worldwide learn self-respect, and thus the diversity of national qualities becomes the source of a generous and friendly rivalry.

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