One of the pioneers of the Olympic movement was Ferenc Kemény, of Hungary, a founding member of the International Olympic Committee. He was a member of the International Bureau of Peace in Berne (Bureau international et permanent de la Paix) and also of the International Institute of Peace in Monaco (Institut international de la Paix). Together with Mór Jókai, the great master of Hungarian romantic prose, he dedicated his life to peace in his country until his tragic death at the end of the Second World War.

Ferenc Kemény was a modern humanist, and it was for this progressive and open attitude, he became a colleague and close friend of Pierre de Coubertin. However, his anti-war feelings eventually led him to being ignored and criticised.

Today we aim at probing into our country's past, studying its prominent figures, among them, Ferenc Kemény. He was born in Nagybecskerek, Hungary on the 17th July 1860. He attended secondary school in Budapest then for three years went to Pfleiderer's boarding school near Stuttgart where he mastered the German language. Kemeny took his first degree in Physics and Mathematics in 1883. To learn French, he then went to Paris to study at the College of France and at the Sorbonne.

While in Paris, Kemeny made friends with Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The young Frenchman was dissatisfied with his country’s methods of education and the two men exchanged views about the reforms of the French pedagogy. They frequently discussed the renewal of the quadrennial games of the ancient world and dreamed together about its return. Once, when walking together, Kemeny proposed to organise the first modern Olympic Games on the classical Greek territory.

The friendship resulted in Ferenc Kemény’s election as a member of the International Olympic Committee established on the 23rd June 1894. Immediately, he strove for the creating of a Hungarian delegation of athletes to be sent to Athens. Due to his extensive work, the Hungarian Preparatory Committe of the Olympic Games was formed on the 19th December 1895. Though few in number, Hungarian athletes participated in the 1896 Games. In 1904 Kemény was still a member of the Hungarian Olympic delegation, but by April 1907 he was forced to retire from his position in the IOC. In one of his statements, he recalled his neglect as a result of his pursuits on a national level as member of the Hungarian Gymnastic Club. Thereafter, Kemeny was virtually forgotten on an international level; though his friends abroad contacted him through letters. When the IOC held its Session in Budapest in May 1911, Pierre de Coubertin dearly missed the presence of his friend.

Ferenc Kemény, no longer a part of the Olympic movement, became a physical education teacher. Baron de Coubertin, in a letter to Kemény, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Olympic Games, wrote the following words: “The Games certainly did not stop developing and our work of which you put in your share, which I shall never forget, brings credit to us.”

In spite of this comment, Kemény, founder of the Hungarian Olympic Committee, took no part in this, and died on the 21st November 1944 without the farewell of the Hungarian sports movement, for which he did so much.

Avery Brundage, then President of the IOC, during the festive session of the Hungarian Olympic Committee to commemorate its 75th anniversary the 26th September 1970 said:

“From the very beginning Hungary has been a member of the Olympic family and the Hungarian Ferenc Kemény... being a friend to Baron Coubertin had fully understood the noble principles of Olympism and also the philosophy of the Olympic movement. As a result, sports were
Ferenc Kemény.

firmly established in Hungary even when the country was a member of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy i.e. before it became an independent country."

In Eger, where Ferenc Kemény was a teacher, the sports hall, inaugurated the 1st June 1980, was named after him.

The slogan of Mór Jókai, worded in the spirit of Comenius is, today, carrying more and more emphasis: “The development of the world reflects the way young people are being educated.”

J. K.