

(continued from previous page)

"We'll be glad of that fire yet," said a voice behind me. Other references I have heard to the unquenched flame have also been wanting in awe. One may question, of course, whether Greeks themselves had much more success with their tallow or whatever it was they used; and doubtless there were sceptics among the 40,000 who were seated at ancient Olympia. But not, I hope, any to compare with my New Zealander, who assured me that "They turn it down at night and just have a pilot-light going." The man who can believe in the Minister of Fuel more easily than he can believe in Apollo is indeed an unbeliever.

ALSO, there was something lacking of deference to the musical compositions that were to be heard from time to time. The procedure for the Olympic Victory Ceremony, which is held for each completed event at some suitable moment in the Stadium (such as during the 10,000 metre walk or the putting-the-shot) was as follows: The winners, first, second, and third for each event came out in blazers and slacks, and stood quietly in the arena, and then were called three at a time to a dais where they were given their medals. Behind the giant scoreboard (which cost £20,000 to put up) Navy signallers were hurriedly sliding into place the boards giving the names of the winners and their countries; the name-boards had been specially painted each day for each placed winner, which presumably accounted for some of the £20,000. Now this took a few moments to do, and it was understandable if the multitude found the dexterity of the Navy signallers as fascinating as any Olympic event.

Well, the wrestling results had all been completed, the name-boards had been painted (in some very improbable combinations of letters, too) and so we were ready for the Victory Ceremony, which is completed by the breaking out of the winner's national flag over the scoreboard, and the playing by the R.A.F. band of his National Anthem.

The fly-weight results went up. Turkey had won. We saw the Turk take his medal, and turn towards the pole; the flag broke, and the band played the Turkish National Anthem; which turned out to be not that thing by Mozart but something else altogether: it was not even connected with the Ruins of Athens, which might have been seemly, in the context. It was something quite other—a nonentity of a tune in the minor mode.

The results came down, the winners departed, and we sat down. The Navy men hustled round behind the board. Knowing their business, they left the word Turkey in its place. The bantam-weight winners came out. A new Turk swung on his heels to face a fresh flag, and with him, we 90,000 stood again to attention.

The bantam-weight results went down, and we seated ourselves, while the light-weight results began to go up. The R.A.F. Band, just below me, made no rustle on their music stands. The Navy men, knowing their business, left the word Turkey in its place. A third brawny Turk stood stiffly to attention. So did we.

How can the mind but wander, at such a time? I remembered the two volumes of a huge dictionary I once had access to, wherein were two pages of the themes of the National Anthems of the world. I remembered having thought when I saw them that that



SOME of the thousands of pigeons released at the opening ceremony of the Games flying over the heads of the athletes and crowd

collection of tunes might well represent the worst music in the world, with a few exceptions. And here was one, and not an exception. What was it that it called to mind? Then I remembered—it was that song in *The Week-end Book*:

I wish I WERE a
elePHanTiaphus
and could PICK up the coCONuts with
my nose.

We'll, anyway, it would be over in a minute. The third Turk and his runners-up left the dais. The Navy men tore down their name-boards, painted for such a brief moment of glory and now gone from sight for ever. Ninety thousand pairs of eyes watched what they did. The word Turkey stayed just where it was. This was the fourth time. It was altogether too much, and the crowd had to laugh—but uneasily, as if there was the thought in the back of everyone's mind that an International Incident could as easily start this way as any other, in these times. Once more we stood, and knowing the tune well by this time I began to memorise the bass part. If it hadn't been for some Hungarian fellow, who was inconsiderate enough to have won the next

section, I believe I would know it all now.

Emotional, a little uncomfortable, a little apprehensive about the weather, and lacking in solemnity, 90,000 of us. We watched three heats of a steeplechase, enduring vicarious agony for the several competitors who looked as if they ought to fall dead rather than do that water-jump once more; in each single heat, the Swede gained a few yards at the water-jump, while all the others lost some by landing well into the water; we watched a little Spaniard in red overtake the Swede in blue three laps running on the flat, and three laps running lose his advantage to the Swede at the water-jump. We applauded the winning Swede because he was a human being of strength and endurance; we applauded a tired, limping Briton who came in half a lap later because he was a human being. We watched the discus.

We watched the cloud.

We watched one competitor of whom much was expected. Others had seen him in heats, and for special reasons he was regarded as a hero. The moment of his expected triumph came, and we

watched his swiftness and ease. The triumph seemed to be his. Thousands of hearts fluttered. Then there was a mishap, and he was out of the event altogether. The hero fallen! He went alone to the competitors' exit, his head held high, and a wave of consoling applause followed him along the crowd.

"He's a cow of a joker, actually," my companion told me. "It's gone to his head—or so they say."

Realism or idealism? Scepticism or faith? Sacred flame or pilot light? Doves, bringing word of peace, or clouds, bringing warning of war? Pindar's odes, glorifying the athlete as the image of physical and moral perfection, or Antipodean bluntness?

I don't know. Perhaps the Archbishop of York knows, or the King of England, or Labeach (the one-man-team from Panama), or the man who told me about the Australian Flyer (or the Australian Flyer herself), or the man who turns the flame down at night when 90,000 backs have been turned, and only the cleaners are there to see whether he does it carefully. Perhaps no one has ever known the answer to that uncomfortable question.

—A.A.