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IT STARTED AT SOLFERINO

One Hundred Years of Red Cross

On 24th June 1859 three hundred thousand men met in the battle of Solferino, a little village in the Italian Province of Mantua. The front extended across more than five miles. For over fifteen hours the Austrians and French fought bitterly in blazing sunshine and sweltering heat. Infantry and artillery attacks followed each other incessantly, and the guns created terrible havoc on both sides. The stench of dust, cannon powder and blood was nauseating and the slaughtering of men and horses was horrible.

A young traveller from Geneva, 31 years old, by the name of Henry Dunant, a banker who went to Italy to meet the Emperor Napoleon III hoping to get a business concession, accidentally became an unwilling witness of the battle of Solferino and its ghastly scenes. He was shaken, and on returning home he described the appalling scenes which he had witnessed in a book called "A Memory of Solferino". He gave a description of the battle, of the dead and the 40,000 wounded who lay there after sundown as though mown with a scythe — poor soldiers with gaping wounds who were tortured by unbearable pain. No water, no bandages, and the handful of military personnel unable to cope.

For three days and three nights Dunant himself gave a helping hand. He took no sides in the conflict; for him there were only the dead and the suffering, and an idea started to take shape. In his book he summarizes it as follows: "Would it not be desirable that the highest military representatives, meeting at a congress like those of Cologne and Châlons, took the opportunity to come to an international understanding, holy and binding, which, once accepted and confirmed by all, could serve as a basis for a welfare society in aid of war-wounded in the various countries of Europe?" He also added that humanity was asking for such action. It would require a very high degree of unselfishness and sacrifice. They had to be established even in times of peace, these voluntary organisations for the aid of the wounded.

The factual, almost unemotional report of the horrors of war was a sensation and shook public opinion all over Europe. In February 1863 five men in Geneva decided to put into practice the ideas proclaimed in Dunant's book. He joined with General Guillaume Dufour, commander-in-chief of the Swiss Army, Gustave Moynier, a lawyer, and with two physicians, Louis Appia and Théodore Maunoir. They convened an international conference in Geneva in October 1863. In the following year, delegates of twenty-six governments met again in Geneva. They signed the First Geneva Convention and chose, as a symbol, a white flag bearing a red cross — the reverse of the Swiss National Flag. This First Geneva Convention was then amended and revised several times and modernized in 1949.

There are two international Red Cross organizations: the International Committee of the Red Cross, a committee of Swiss citizens, founded in 1863, and the League of the Red Cross Societies, a federation of national societies, founded in 1919.

Under the Geneva Convention the International Committee of the Red Cross acts as a neutral intermediary between warring nations and gives aid to prisoners of war.

Another function of the Committee is to protect the principle of the Red Cross movement. The League of the Red Cross Societies promotes co-operation, programme development, and mutual help among the Red Cross Societies of the world.

What the Red Cross has accomplished in the world scarcely gives rise today to astonishment. Even its amazing war-work seems to the populations of the majority of countries as the normal operation of an institution whose existence is self-explanatory. More than that! Whenever the common sentiment of humanity is trampled under foot in some part of the world, mankind has become accustomed to look to the Red Cross as one would question one's conscience. Much is asked of the Red Cross — more sometimes than it is able to give. Its activities have become so familiar to all that one can hardly realize the revolutionary character of its first efforts, or the daring displayed, even sometimes without their knowing it, by those who had the merit of founding the institution.

"Warrior without Weapons" Marcel Junod, a Swiss doctor engaged in Red Cross work, called the Red Cross in his book published in 1951. And warriors they are, the men and women fighting against disease, famine, suffering and cruelty. Many are the Red Cross tasks.

During the second world war seventy-six delegations were established in belligerent countries, whose 340 members undertook 11,000 visits in prisoners' camps. 36 million gift parcels at a total value of 3.5 milliard Swiss francs and weighing 500,000 metric tons were sent to three million prisoners. The assistance given to civilians amounted to 500 million Swiss francs.

But the work went on after the war. In twelve countries soldiers and civilians imprisoned in 800 camps during conflicts and upheavals were looked after. Several hundred thousand families were brought together again. In 1962 60,500 cases of missing persons were dealt with in Geneva — 41% of these investigations were successful in North Africa, Congo, Laos, Indonesia, Goas, and Middle East.

In thirty-six countries war invalids were looked after and gifts were distributed. Clothing, food, medicines, soap and rugs for Algeria; medical supplies for the Yemen; tents, antibiotics, clothing and food for the victims of the earthquake in Persia; financial support and help with rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees in Nepal; warm clothing for the sick in the conflict between India and China are but a few examples of practical help the International Red Cross has recently been giving.

The Swiss Red Cross has a special position as both large international Red Cross organisations are in Geneva. Not only is it always at hand, but it has large reserves of material, of late also in the field of blood transfusion (over 100,000 blood donors are at its disposal today) which come in useful in emergencies.

The foundation of the Swiss Red Cross took place on 17th July 1866. It went under various names until 1914, since when it has been called "Swiss Red Cross". Many are its duties in Switzerland, help in catastrophes like fires, floods, avalanches. It provides beds and linen for large needy families and looks after old and permanently sick people. For the past two decades the care of children has been in the centre of its activities. Some 200,000 children from fifteen countries have been in Switzerland on health-giving holidays. Much help has also been given outside Switzerland, in floods in Somalia and Ankara, earthquakes in Yugoslavia, the pit catastrophe at Luisenthal in the Saar and floods in Hamburg. The help given to the Hungarian refugees in Switzerland since 1956 constitutes a considerable contribution in relief and rehabilitation.

In September 1960 the Swiss Red Cross sent a medical team of about twenty people to the Congo, where a tremendous amount of help has been given not only to the sick, but also in maternity and welfare and in the training of Congolese nurses. Since 1960, 120 Swiss have been taking part in this action.

The annual report of the Swiss Red Cross for 1962 showed a turnover of Fr.9,637,000. The collection made every year in May had resulted in over 1½ million francs. There were legacies and gifts and a federal subsidy of Fr.100,000 towards ordinary expenditure and another of Fr.120,000 for the training of nursing personnel.

250 full-time workers were employed in 1962. 2,277 men and 5,255 women worked in the voluntary detachments, and the membership reached a total of 62,000.

And so in 1963, one hundred years after the historic meeting of the five men in Geneva, the principles of the Red Cross — impartial relief to victims of war and disaster — are acknowledged and honoured all over the world and practised by 156 million individual members of ninety-three national societies under the flags of the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and the Red Sun and Lion. On all continents, these organizations strive to prevent or lessen human suffering in almost all its forms.

BASLE WELCOMES BERLIN

From 3rd to 8th May "Berlin Days" were held in Basle to repay to Berlin the courtesy of having welcomed Basle in March of last year. The slogan was "Basle greets Berlin", and a number of special functions, concerts and exhibitions took place. There was a gala concert by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Herbert von Karajan. Their interpretation of Beethoven's Second Symphony and Dvorak's Fourth Symphony caused the audience to give frenetic applause. An exhibition of photos and tables on Berlin's history, the present lay-out and on modern dwellings and industrial buildings was held at the "Gewerbemuseum". The director of the famous Berlin Zoological Gardens presented an African stork (Dattelstorch) to the Basle Zoo, and there was a football match between the two cities, Basle winning 2—0.

At the Kasino there was a "Bunter Abend", genuine Berlin entertainment mixed with the best of Basle humour — both witty and aggressive. Press conferences and meetings on political and economic questions were organised. Church groups met and the Basle and Berlin students had lively discussion groups on the position of the free Berlin University, as well as on legal, health and literary subjects. Berlin pastors preached from Basle pulpits. Bookshops exhibited just about everything ever written on Berlin or by Berliners.

Everywhere the black Berlin bear, emblem of the great German city, was to be seen on its white background bordered in red. 195 of them were put up between the Swiss and the Basle flags in the main streets, and shop-windows and trams were gaily decorated with thousands more. Large crowds welcomed the various high officials who had travelled to Basle, none more enthusiastically than Herrn Willy Brandt, the popular Mayor of Berlin. Two thousand people collected at the large festival hall of the "Mustermesse", where the Mayor spoke in a fascinating manner on "Berlin — a European Task". His visit brought to a close a successful week which has consolidated the friendship between the two cities and strengthened the relationship with a town which has become a symbol of European spirit and freedom.

(A.T.S. and "Basler Nachrichten".)

The French philosopher, François Mauriac, usually pessimistic, has said "Because there is Red Cross, there is hope." Two events have shown over the past months that this may become an important factor in the establishment of peace. In Berlin in September last year the Red Cross managed to make both sides accept responsibility and to ensure that the Geneva Convention would be kept not only *de jure* but also *de facto*. The negotiations proved most helpful in furthering understanding and security and are very much in the interests of peace.

And finally, in the Cuba crisis, the Red Cross was shown great confidence by all parties concerned, the United Nations, U.S.A. and Cuba. Its former President, Dr. P. Ruegger, was asked to go to New York to negotiate. The Red Cross had a task in this which surpassed the conventional and traditional framework. It proved that it was determined not only to mitigate the sufferings of modern warfare but to do its utmost to prevent it.

So the Red Cross can celebrate its Centenary, in Switzerland and all over the world, in a spirit of mutual assistance and understanding with no strings attached, in which all men of good will can participate.

(Based on "Welt Schweizer" of the A.S.S., Berne, "Swiss American"; "Switzerland Calling"; S.N.T.O. and A.T.S.)

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