The origin of the Red Cross

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150 answered the call. These were the older contingent and many an anxious face was seen. Men who had to leave their business and occupation to go back to Switzerland, which they had left years ago, to dig trenches or relearn to shoulder a rifle or handle a machine gun. Many of these had not touched a lethal weapon for years in many cases not since leaving the "Rekrutenschule" and the present art of soldiering will be an entirely new experience to them. But whatever the circumstances are when Mother Helvetia calls, her sons hear the call and answer back "Hast noch der Söhne, ja, wie sie St. Jakob sah, freudvoll zum Streit."

We of the old guard, who responded to our country's call in 1914, wish all those who left England to protect the Swiss neutrality a hearty "God's speed and a safe and speedy return to the hospitable shores of Great Britain." *J. J. S.*

CORRESPONDENCE.

(*In encouraging and publishing correspondence on any matter of interest to our readers we wish to stress that we do not necessarily subscribe to the opinions expressed therein.* ED. S.O.)

136, Bath Road,
Cheltenham Spa.
18th Sept., 1939.

The Editor,
The Swiss Observer,
23, Leonard Street,
London, E.C.2.

SWISS NEUTRALITY.

Sir,

I read with interest Mr. J. Frei's letter in last week's issue of the S.O. but regret that I cannot share his views.

May I remind the writer that the Swiss Neutrality Act is not solely a matter of National Convenience, but rather an International Necessity.

There is little doubt that the people of Switzerland look favourably on the war-like actions of France and Great Britain, in so far as they protect and defend democratic ideals (and incidentally themselves) *But*, and let this be a "big but," Switzerland did not ask them to do so.

Mr. Frei's reply will be that had not France and Britain fought over Poland, in due course of time Switzerland would had gone the same way as Austria, Sudetenland, etc. This argument, to my mind, is hypothetical and a presumption, no doubt arrived at by deduction of past events, but nevertheless a presumption and therefore, over such a speculative theory, Switzerland *cannot* and *must not* do or say anything that would mar her most important national and international political asset, namely, her Neutrality and with that is included her integral independence.

We believe that Great Britain and France are fighting for a Principle. Swiss public opinion may approve of that Principle, but not necessarily of the Powers' action thereof. Switzerland can and will only fight when her great neutrality Principle has been violated, by *any* foreign political Power.

Mr. J. Frei's opinion is strongly commensensical and no doubt very popular in many quarters, but as I see things insufficiently logical.

Yours in all good Faith,
ALFONSO TOSIO.

THE ORIGIN OF THE "RED CROSS."

Quietly and without any fanfare, the Red Cross has just celebrated its 75th birthday. Its originator was a Swiss banker named Henri Dunant who happened to be travelling near Solferino in 1859, where the Austrians, under the Emperor Francis Joseph, were fighting the French and Italian troops under Napoleon III.

The wounded had to look after themselves, since their comrades were too busy to give them any assistance.

Dunant made it his business to organise a corps of women nurses. He also persuaded, bullied, and commandeered civilian peasants to carry the wounded into shelter. He himself worked all day in the battlefields. He utilised his nights to write letters describing the situation to the newspapers of Paris and Geneva.

These letters were published, and as a result the citizens of France and Switzerland began collecting bandages and lint. The start was small enough, but it was, at least, a start, and once again newspapers demonstrated their value in public service by backing Dunant's ideas.

Shortly after his return to Switzerland, Dunant published an account of his experiences under the title "Souvenir de Solferino." The book became a best-seller.

Eventually an international conference was called, and the result was the Treaty of Geneva in 1864. Each signatory nation bound itself to organise national units for the purpose of giving impartial treatment to all wounded, regardless of nationality. The symbol adopted was that of the Swiss flag with the colours reversed, a red cross on a white background.

The Red Cross soon gained world-wide recognition. In Mohammedan countries the symbol was changed to the Red Crescent, and in Persia to the Red Lion and Sun, but the objects of the movement remained the same in all countries.

The scope of its activities widened, too. Although originally evolved for the succour of war-wounded, the Red Cross found many other fields of endeavour. Cyclones, earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters take an annual toll of human life, and the Red Cross found plenty of permanent work to do in looking after the victims of such upheavals.

The World War saw many further extensions of Red Cross work. At Geneva an international agency with a staff of 2,000 people was maintained. The seventeen different departments of this agency dealt with inquiries from thirty belligerent nations. Its daily post varied from 2,000 to 17,000 letters. Before the end of the war the agency's card index contained 5,000,000 cards.

Thanks to this agency, thousands of missing men were traced, assistance was given to prisoners of war, regular visits of inspection were made to internment camps, and facilities were obtained for the evacuation of civilians.

In peace-time the Red Cross concerns itself with relieving distress wherever it occurs, looking after refugees, aiding the victims of famine, and so on.

It has established an international nursing centre in London, where nurses from different countries go through special courses. The Red Cross also maintains a number of permanent general hospitals.

E. H. 14.9.39.