

Flag that knows no frontiers

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the first war casualty. It certainly is. It would take more than a suave Swiss hotelier to make me apologise for all Britain did and suffered in the war. But it is healthy to be reminded how shrill and militant in our ordinary social and business affairs we have become in the last nine years.

We all know our rights; we neither take nor permit liberties in dealings with others. In our present society most people feel it necessary to be permanently watching the milkman, the tobacconist, the clerk at the Town Hall, in case he "tries a fast one." The manager and the union secretary, the M.P. and the prospective candidate — and the housewife — have learnt to keep their eyes wide open. We are all watchdogs now, and the cacophony of yapping in these islands is almost deafening.

"It's pretty noisy in here, isn't it?" I bellowed at a mill-girl the other day in a cotton mill near Manchester. "Is it, love?" she shouted back, and added: "We come not to notice it at all." That is the terrible thing about our modern shrillness.

The food in Switzerland? Yes, Mrs. Cauliflower, it is still superlative, even in quite small hotels. And here again it is surely a good thing for us to be reminded how much worse one's daily meals at home and in the canteen are than they used to be. It is nothing to be ashamed of, since we have just fought a war. But it is something to be dissatisfied with, and this dissatisfaction need have nothing to do with politics.

Most of us males are extremely ignorant of and conservative about food, and are today much better fed than we deserve. But it is almost worth going to Switzerland to be reminded how appallingly badly the ordinary English hotel cook (I dare not say housewife) handles potatoes and fish. And perversely we have come to take it for granted, and even like it that way....

Switzerland's Natural beauties seem lovelier this year than I can ever remember them. It is, of course, an illusion. It is we, and not Switzerland, that have changed, and as our lives have become gradually greyer and grittier, the clean pure air of the mountains and the timeless silence of the meadows and terraces affect us more acutely. But indoors as well one is aware that the Swiss have contrived to keep alive something near to the pre-war way of living. Please do not think that I regard this way as better than our own, or purchased at anything but a great price. But here, in the very centre of troubled Europe, is a small and exquisitely lovely country which by remaining neutral in two wars has contrived to keep intact something which all other European countries have lost.

Tranquillity of spirit partly describes it. This the Swiss want to share with their neighbours, and we in turn (and the Germans, for that matter) would greatly benefit by sending holiday-makers to benefit from it for a few weeks a year. The 200,000 or 300,000 visitors authorised by the Board of Trade this year are only a fraction of what Switzerland needs and can absorb. Is there really no way of stepping-up this total?

The answer is that of course there are ways, if we want to do it enough and think it worth-while. The Swiss could make it easier for us by buying British goods more eagerly and accepting long-term deliveries. But if their hotels stay empty much longer they will not be buying anything much anywhere.

FLAG THAT KNOWS NO FRONTIERS.

By JAMES DREW.

(This article is reprinted from the "Yorkshire Evening News," by kind permission of the Editor.)

Just 84 years ago there appeared on a field of battle a symbol entirely new to the world.

It was carried on the arm of a Swiss surgeon whose name is remembered by few people to-day, but the courageous and idealistic action of the man who carried it as his sole protection in the thick of battle will shortly be finding an important echo in the modern world.

The then strange talisman worn on the doctor's arm, on that momentous occasion during the Prusso-Danish War, was a plain red cross on a white background — now recognised and respected the world over as the emblem of the International Red Cross, which has called in Stockholm this August the first International Conference it has been possible to hold since 1938.

Most people think of the International Red Cross purely as an organisation which looks after the wounded and prisoners in time of war. But this, one of the world's few really effective international bodies, has many beneficent activities in time of peace — as the recent appointment of the head of Sweden's Red Cross Society to the ticklish role of peacemaker in Palestine well illustrates.

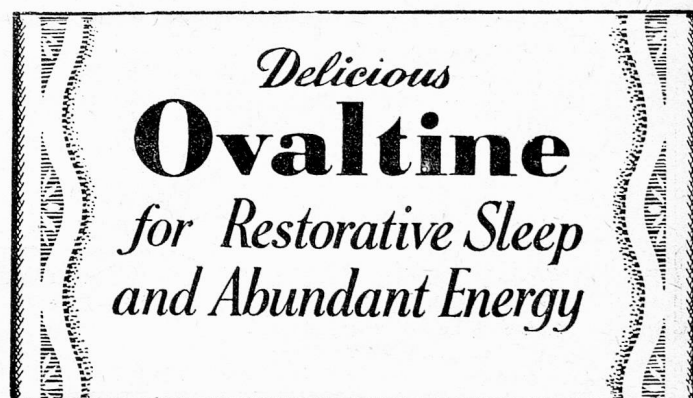
Here, for example, are just a few of the numerous tasks for suffering humanity successfully undertaken under the sign of the Red Cross during 1947.

Some 15,000 "displaced" Chinese nationals, driven from their Javanese homes during the disturbances which occurred last year in the Dutch East Indies, were fed, clothed, registered and finally sent home.

Two thousand reports were made on P.O.W. camps in Africa, Czechoslovakia, the Far East, France, Great Britain, the Middle East and Poland. Hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war, having no Protecting Power, were rendered legal and judicial assistance and received valuable relief.

Vigorous appeals were made, and are still being made, to the victorious Powers for the release or repatriation of all prisoners of war.

In its permanent role as an international information centre, the Red Cross opened 50,000 new individual inquiries on behalf of private persons and military



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missions relating to prisoners of war deceased or still captive; while the German files were increased by another 1,000,000 index cards.

Numerous transfers of funds belonging to repatriated or deceased prisoners of war were successfully completed.

Civilian internees, in particular in Australia and India, also benefited by the intervention of the International Red Cross, which speeded up their repatriation.

Intervention was made on behalf of displaced persons, particularly in Denmark, the various zones of Germany, and in the Far East.

Big programmes of relief to civilian populations were undertaken, new activities of this type having been inaugurated as the result of the civilian strife in Greece, Indo-China, Indonesia and Paraguay.

Medical aid, milk, vitamins and blankets were provided for 1,600 Hindu refugees, victims of the tragic events which accompanied the proclamation of the independence of India and the partition of that country into two Dominions.

Peaceful and properly organised exchanges of populations between India and Pakistan have since been arranged by special Red Cross Missions to New Delhi and Karachi.

The most remarkable thing about this vast range of activities to which must be added the important peace-time work of the Red Cross in connection with the development of international law, its co-operation in the revision of existing international Conventions, and the drafting of new ones — is that they are carried on through the auspices of an organisation which has no legal status or public identity except as an association of a small number of private individuals.

That the world-wide activities of the Red Cross can be carried out, in many instances, in spite of sealed frontiers and in the midst of violently conflicting inter-racial or international interests, is, in fact, made possible basically by the special world status enjoyed by the International Red Cross Committee, upon which, when normal intercourse between peoples is broken off, the National Red Cross Societies depend for the fulfilment of their tasks.

The charter of this astonishing organisation is an

unwritten one; the Geneva Convention does not even mention it except to state that its activities shall not be hampered. Its enormous potentialities are founded upon its unique constitution.

Not only was the International Committee of the Red Cross founded in traditionally neutral Switzerland; its headquarters have always been at Geneva, and its membership, limited to 25, is entirely Swiss.

The Committee, on the other hand, maintains complete independence of all political and administrative control by the Swiss Confederation, as by any other Government. Its members are unpaid and unconnected with any outside authority.

Thus the complete faithfulness of the International Committee to the two great Red Cross principles of absolute impartiality and independence, especially in political and religious matters, is maintained beyond question. It is accepted by practically every one of the world's peoples.

President of the International Committee is Dr. Paul Ruegger, formerly Swiss Minister in London. It cannot order anybody to do anything; it can only ask them. What it achieves it achieves mainly on the reciprocal basis of "What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

To meet its enormous financial requirements in connection with the supply of food, clothing and medical relief, the International Committee depends upon donations from National Red Cross Societies and other welfare organisations, and from governments. During the war, rather more than half of all donations for the general expenses of the Committee itself came from Switzerland.

These funds are administered by the Committee as trustee and intermediary, and with strict impartiality. Thus, during the war, millions of next-of-kin benefited by the Committee's services, even though they were debarred by wartime legislation governing the transfer of currency from making any voluntary contribution whatever towards its general funds.

The International Red Cross Committee, in fact, emerged from the war no richer than it was at the beginning — and that is how it always has emerged from its ceaseless and manifold activities on behalf of mankind.

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