

## B O O K S

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### DER BEITRAG DES ROTEN KREUZES AN DIE FORTBILDUNG DES VÖLKERRECHTS<sup>1</sup>

*by*

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Under this heading, Mr. Hans Haug, Secretary General of the Swiss Red Cross, published his lecture in June 1963 to the St. Gall High School of Economic and Social Sciences. The merit of this work is that in a clear and convincing summary it describes the preponderant rôle of the Red Cross movement over a hundred years in the field of International Law as it affects the laws of war.

It was always during war and specially on the battlefield that the worst in man came to the fore and when expression was given to his most noble virtues and his finest sentiments. The most flagrant abuse, the most useless cruelty, disregard for the most elementary human rights, were countered by such humanitarian ideas as right of asylum, respect for the wounded, the conception of a just war which is characterized by the humane manner of its pursuit (St. Augustine). And each regression gives rise to a new leap forward: the wars of conquest on the American continent, the horrors of the Thirty Years War, were followed by the humanitarian capitulations of the 17th century, and subsequently by the fundamental declarations of Vattel and Rousseau, who laid the basis of the principle distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants, a distinction which today bids fair to disappear. In the 19th century human sentiment waxed in proportion to the waves of blood which spread across the battlefields. Then came Dunant's action at Solferino, followed later by the publication of his book and the zeal with which he sought to bring his ideas to fruition. As luck had it, he was able to find men with the will and the ability to help him.

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<sup>1</sup> Das Schweizerische Rote Kreuz, Bern, 1963.

The year 1864, in which the first Diplomatic Conference was a success and in which an international convention in favour of the wounded and sick was concluded, was also the beginning of a continuous upsurge, the most recent aspect of which was the Conventions of 1949 and which has not yet played itself out. In this fashion the Red Cross rose as an adversary of war.

Mr. Hans Haug then clearly and briefly explains the successive and parallel conquests of the law of war and of international law, i.e. : the movement launched in 1864 in favour of the wounded and the sick and later the shipwrecked, followed up at The Hague on behalf of other categories of war victims such as prisoners of war, the shipwrecked as well as civilian populations. These provisions were renewed and embodied in international law in 1929 and 1949.

However, so little time after the latest Conventions drawn up in 1949 to obviate a repetition of the horrors of the Second World war, the danger is still very great. The efforts of the Red Cross, particularly of the International Committee, aiming at the adoption by States of a series of draft rules to minimize the danger of an atomic war, have not so far met with success. The task must nevertheless be continued to bring knowledge of the Geneva Conventions to all populations, thus promoting the evolution of humanitarian law. For the spirit of the Geneva Conventions is respect for life and the dignity of man. When this ideal is inculcated into all, peace will be assured.

*J. de P.*