

## A GESTURE OF FELLOWSHIP

It is thanks to the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and its Central Tracing Agency in Geneva that prisoners of war captured in the Yemen, are able to correspond with their families. The humanitarian aspect of this work is illustrated in innumerable messages of gratitude. A few brief examples are quoted below :

“ Thanks to your message, we now know that our son Arafa is alive . . . may God be with you so that you may continue to succour your fellow-men. ” The writer of this latter also wrote to his son who was a prisoner : “ . . . we put our trust in God ; the day of your return will be a day of celebration . . . be of good courage . . . ” Other letters of thanks are received by the ICRC which, merely by transmitting messages from soldiers, was able to alleviate the anguish of relations who were without news of them.

Times without number the ICRC, which undertakes this activity in conformity with the Geneva Conventions, has in the past had occasion to repeat this gesture of human solidarity which dissipates the uncertainty and anxiety of families. It has done this many times, no doubt millions of times, to judge from the 45 million index-cards in the records of the Central Tracing Agency and the 28 million family messages which the ICRC has transmitted from one hostile country to another.

This vast figure refers to cases which arose during the two World Wars. For the 1939-1945 war alone, the Agency classified 36 million index-cards in respect of some 15 million individual cases. Naturally, not every investigation was a success. It also often happened that the Agency had only bad news to convey, to

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the effect that the person cherished and sought by the family would never return. But it also sent messages of comfort and hope by the million.

The ICRC also administers the International Tracing Service at Arolsen (Federal Republic of Germany), which carries on a parallel activity but which concentrates especially on the fate of deported and interned civilians in Germany and German occupied territory during the war. This Agency has classified some 25 million index-cards.

The accomplishment of this task by the ICRC necessitates close co-operation with many National Red Cross Societies which also have their own Tracing Services or Information Bureaux. Their files contain many millions of index-cards which are still consulted, for enquiries continue to flow into the Red Cross even now, nearly nineteen years after the end of the war. These Services and Bureaux are all in touch with one another, thus forming one of the world's most extensive networks with the aim solely of alleviating mental suffering. This network covers East and West ; it takes no account of boundaries and is at the service of all. Thanks to it the gesture of fellowship performed by the ICRC in the Yemen can be repeated throughout the world whenever enquiries bring to light the fate of a missing person. This indeed, is one of the miracles of the Red Cross.