

# B O O K S

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DUNANT PARMi NOUS <sup>1</sup>

*by*

LOUIS GERMOND

With all its vicissitudes, its periods of brightness alternating with those of gloom, Henry Dunant's life could hardly fail to inspire writings of widely varying types. Admiration hardly admits of disparaging nuance and criticism dealing with such a complicated personality almost invariably lays stress on trivialities to the detriment of the essential values which, in this case, are much more genuine and of greater significance in the eyes of posterity.

In his book written in French at the request of the Swiss Junior Red Cross, Mr. Louis Germond steers a course between the two extremes which are equally out of character. The foreword by Mr. P. Oguey, State Councillor of the Canton de Vaud and President of the World Conference of Educators, which met in Lausanne, recommends the book to young people.

"I had", wrote Mr. Germond, "imagined a young man full of zeal whose life had prepared him for a bold ideal: I retained the memory of the patriarch living in Heiden calmly and quietly. But between the two was the life of a man, his eccentricities, his faults and his mistakes".

To relate this life story without denigration or embellishment was a difficult task, the more delicate as the book was intended especially for the young. No doubt Mr. Germond considered Dunant's merits sufficiently well established to allow his weaknesses to be brought to light. He was right, for in Dunant there was no iniquity, and his faults as a business man were inseparable from the very qualities which gave life to the Red Cross, such as his faith in the institution, generosity, energy and incurable optimism.

Unlike some biographies, Mr. Germond's book carefully avoids the pitfalls of excessive imagination. No incident is invented or

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<sup>1</sup> Published by the Swiss Red Cross, Berne, 1964; 200 pp.

built up from frail indications to fill the gaps of our knowledge of Dunant and his life. Readers will descry the painstaking care with which the author has assembled his facts, sifting out the superfluous, to evoke, account for and bring into proper perspective the climate of Dunant's time. The informed reader might at times regret some lack of detail, but this was assuredly designed to add vividness to the account and to avoid overburdening young minds. Mr. Germond's research has in any case made a psychological contribution. Mr. Germond even confides in his readers, relating his own experience when this proves useful in recreating atmosphere. In the light of this personal viewpoint, Dunant's childhood and adolescence can be looked at from a new angle.

We must also be grateful to the author for not concealing the serious differences of opinion between Moynier and Dunant and for having shown that the fundamental character of each of these men made some divergence of opinion inevitable. The author acknowledges their individual merits: the level-headedness of the one and the dynamism of the other were equally necessary to the inchoate Red Cross. Even more than this, differences of opinion might well be valuable in the lessons which can be learned. Those arising from Moynier's reasoning and Dunant's emotive force were of that type and we can say even today that they influence new actions undertaken by the Red Cross.

*R. M.*

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### THE RED CROSS ON STAMPS <sup>1</sup>

*by*

WILSON A. SWANKER, M.D.

This handbook, one of a philatelic series covering a wide range of subjects, is devoted to Red Cross stamps in the world. It includes a list of issues by countries in commemoration of Red Cross events

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<sup>1</sup> Published by the American Topical Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. 22 p.