

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

The Red Cross World — *League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva, 1964, No. 4.*

The XXVIth Session of the League Board of Governors invited National Societies to approach the governmental authorities and especially the Postal Administration of their countries to obtain issues of postage stamps which would mark the Centenary of the Foundation of the Red Cross on a vast scale and in a permanent form.

This appeal was widely heard: 136 States and Territories issued 435 commemorative postage stamps and blocks, each with the Red Cross, Red Crescent or Red Lion and Sun emblem. Many appeared in 1963 but some were only put into circulation this year. Never before has there been such a large number of issues of so many postage stamps in honour of the Red Cross Movement. In 1959, on the occasion of the Centenary of the Birth of the Red Cross Idea on the Battlefield of Solferino, 27 States issued some eighty postage stamps in a single year, which was a record for Red Cross philately at the time.

In fact, the Red Cross comes very close to the stamp record for a specific world event, at present held by the FAO with 137 issues marking its Freedom from Hunger Campaign.

The number and variety of issues show the interest which Governments take in the Red Cross, at both the national and international levels. The complete collection of Centenary stamps is also a striking illustration of the universality of the Movement and of the way in which, one hundred years after its foundation, it is recognised and has made its mark among the people of all continents and countries, whatever their form of government or religion.

The year 1963 was also a bumper one for Red Cross publicity through postage stamps. Hundreds of varieties of these universal messengers, each bearing the Red Cross, Red Crescent or Red Lion and Sun emblem, have been used to frank millions and millions of letters.

For an immense number of people these images took on a voice, evoking the Centenary of the Movement, recalling it for those who already knew about it, informing others of the unceasing presence of the Red Cross.

The Red Cross Centenary issue was also good publicity for Red Cross philately, which as a result has developed steadily in the last year and a half. Most philatelists are taking an interest in this subject for the first time. Many started to collect Red Cross postage stamps during the Centenary and are now looking for previous issues. One example of this new enthusiasm is given by a stamp dealer in Geneva, who previously had only two or three clients specialising in Red Cross philately and now has over sixty on his list for Centenary issues as they appear.

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It was certainly an appealing idea to collect postage stamps issued for one special event by almost all countries, many of which had no previous Red Cross issue to their credit. This was the case of 30 States including Austria, the Holy See, Ireland, Jordan, Peru, the United Kingdom, etc., and also a large number of countries recently independent, such as Cyprus, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Madagascar, Niger, Sierra Leone, Upper Volta . . . It is also interesting to note that two Centenary commemorative postage stamps were put into circulation in each of the 37 Overseas Territories of the United Kingdom, a rare event showing the importance attached to this occasion by the British Governmental Authorities.

One design element predominated in the majority of the Red Cross postage stamps issued in 1963-1964; this was the official Centenary emblem, the stylised lamp and its flame created by the Swiss graphic artist Baumberger. Used in publications, on posters, badges, and many other kinds of material, it has travelled round the world.

The whole history of the Red Cross and the many and varied activities of National Societies are pictured on the stamps; the universality of the Movement and the now well-known face of its founder, Henry Dunant, are also prominently featured. Alongside the postage stamps there were countless temporary postmarks, cancellation marks, First Day covers, seals, etc., which also all contributed to the wide Centenary publicity for the Red Cross.

The postage stamps just issued are in addition to more than 2,000 which have appeared over the years since 1889 and which recall milestones of the Red Cross Movement. Above all, they symbolise the close co-operation between the Red Cross and the postal authorities, often during especially difficult periods; an eloquent testimony to this collaboration is one of the many good results obtained in the Centenary Year.
