

NURSES AND THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

The July 1965 issue of International Review informed its readers that the XIIIth Quadrennial Congress of the International Council of Nurses, meeting in June 1965 at Frankfurt-on-Main, had adopted a clause for insertion in the International Code of Nursing Ethics, namely: "It is important that all nurses be aware of the Red Cross principles and of the nurse's rights and obligations under the terms of the Geneva Conventions of 1949".

In: The Canadian Nurse (8th year, No. 10, 1966) a Florence Nightingale medalist¹, Miss Helen G. McArthur, writes an article stressing the importance for the nursing world of introducing this clause into the code. It is, indeed, important both for the nurse herself and for the better and more general implementation of the Geneva Convention provisions. That is why we have pleasure in reproducing the conclusions of the article in which Miss McArthur, quoting Miss Y. Hentsch, Director, Nursing Bureau of the League, points out the particular responsibilities of medical personnel.

"Special privileges always imply special responsibilities. Strangely enough the Treaty of Geneva makes no mention of special responsibilities of the Army medical personnel. However, one article in the Treaty includes them all: 'The protection due to medical formations and establishments shall cease if they are used to commit acts injurious to the enemy.'

"In other words, it is the responsibility of the Army nurse to see that she does not commit herself, nor anyone under her authority, to acts which would discredit the medical establishment and give an excuse to the enemy for breaking the pact of neutrality that is supposed to protect hospitals. This is a great responsibility and one that demands sober reflection and mature judgment. Temptations are sometimes almost overwhelming to act against the enemy in order to help one's own people. But to give way to such temptation

¹ See *International Review*, May 1957 and May 1958.

only defaces the Red Cross monument to civilization that has been so patiently and persistently built up since the Battle of Solferino ; only defiles the banner that symbolizes the purpose of Henry Dunant to make the horrors of war less ghastly for those whose blood is spilled. Such an act destroys confidence in the loyalty of the nurse to her responsibilities and to the honor of her country, because in giving temporary help to a few she has betrayed the trust placed in her by many.

“ Nurses have been known in rare instances to smuggle correspondence, money, and other forbidden articles through the lines when accompanying refugee children or taking sick or wounded people from one country to another. Because these few have abused their privilege the whole nursing group is subject to suspicion. When one nurse fails to live up to her obligation, the entire group is blamed and never trusted again.

“ The purposes of the Treaty of Geneva are one with those of the nursing profession—to alleviate suffering. The Treaty of Geneva provides special privileges to nurses in time of war to help them fulfil their mission. In return, it requires them to uphold its word of honor and to keep its principles inviolate for the sake of humanity.”

Perhaps for a nurse, the simplest and yet all encompassing statement yet to be used to define the Geneva Conventions is, *All who need care, receive care without delay*. These simple words when practiced to their full significance have meant the preservation of human dignity and indeed life itself to thousands over the past 100 years, and it is the hope and the belief that the humanitarian Red Cross principles and the protection of the Geneva Conventions will be applied for all mankind in the future.
