

Italy

On the initiative of the Swiss Consul in Trieste various events took place there last April, arranged by the Italo-Swiss Cultural Organization. These consisted of a lecture on the origins and development of the Red Cross, the showing of two of the International Committee's films, an exhibition of documents on the present tasks of the ICRC in various countries and also of reproductions of items from the Trieste Agency (1877) archives kept in Geneva.

The lecture by Miss M. Katz, Head of the Italian Section of the Central Tracing Agency, was attended by large numbers of the public, regional officials, the President General and leading members of the Italian Red Cross. Amongst other factors marking our movement's development over a hundred years, the lecturer recalled the close bonds which existed from the beginning between Italy and the Red Cross. These are now related as a tribute to the country of which Gustave Moynier said in 1873: " Ever since I concerned myself in international humanitarian law I have always seen Italy warmly welcoming ideas of peace and generosity ".

... In a country where kindness is virtually a tradition, it is easily understandable that recourse to voluntary aid imposed itself on Henry Dunant. " How many beds can you make available to the wounded? " a French quartermaster asked one of the civil magistrates of Brescia, who replied: " We have 28,000 inhabitants, you can count on 28,000 beds ". Examples of devotion to the suffering were to be found more and more and were remarkable for their spontaneity. Whilst the women of Castiglione busied themselves with the wounded, those of the Italian nobility threw open their palaces to them and presided over most active relief societies. Dunant himself saw these at work.

Formed to fill the needs of the moment these societies could only be of a temporary character. Dunant, however, saw further ahead and urged that they remain on a permanent basis and constitute a European if not a universal organization.

The idea of neutralizing ambulances and medical personnel was not new. Throughout the course of history one can find agree-

ments concluded between military leaders for merciful ends, but their effects remained limited to the event which had brought them into being. When Dunant arrived on the scene the latest champions of having the wounded protected by neutrality were Ferdinando Palasciano and the Frenchman Henri Arrault.

A special place must be reserved for the former amongst the pioneers of humanitarian international law, for not only did he call indefatigably for the idea of giving the respect due to the wounded, but to defend and illustrate this he went so far as to imperil his life. A surgeon in the Bourbon army at the siege of Messina in 1848, Palasciano had in fact given the same treatment to the wounded on both sides, in spite of an order forbidding the sparing of any of the enemy, even if wounded. Only the King's intervention saved him from the firing squad, but all the same he underwent a year's imprisonment.

Palasciano, like Arrault and Dunant, was convinced that only an international treaty could ensure the immunity of the wounded in a definite manner. It was in January 1861, more than one year before the publication of *A Memory of Solferino*, that he delivered his address to the Académia Pontaniana of Naples on "the neutrality of the wounded in time of war".

In June 1864 the Medical Society of Milan initiated the "Italian Association of Aid to Wounded and Sick in Time of War". Due recognition should here be given to its promoter and driving force, Dr. Desare Castiglioni who was its first President.

In the very first conflict in which the Red Cross is involved, the Austro-Italian-Prussian War of 1866, the idea of mutual aid is made evident. The Milanese Committee, through Geneva, appeals to sister Societies.

1866 . . . amongst other events, this was the year of a moving meeting which should be recalled between Louis Appia and Garibaldi. What was Appia doing in the Trentino valley where the valorous patriot was continuing the fight? Flying to the aid of the wounded, he left Geneva and with his brother and two other volunteers formed a "Squadriglia dei Soccoritori volontari delle Valli" which rendered signal service to the followers of Garibaldi.

The 1866 war is of interest from quite a different angle, as a particularly stirring episode in it is the origin of a new step forward

in humanitarian law. This was the battle of Lissa which has rightly been called the "Solferino of the sea". In this encounter the "Re d'Italia", rammed by an Austrian warship, sank immediately with the loss by drowning of 200 of her crew. A tragic event similar to many others, but which brought out the glaring inequality then existing between the fate of the combatant at sea and that on land. The Empress Eugénie expressed this to Dunant... "if there had been one lifeboat there, protected by your international standard, it could have saved them!"

The idea was to gather momentum. On the International Committee's proposal, a Diplomatic Conference, meeting in 1868 in Geneva, adopted a series of new provisions for adapting the principles of the Geneva Conventions to maritime warfare.

We naturally cannot follow the Red Cross in all its interventions during the conflicts of the 19th century (Moynier counted 36 of these). It will be sufficient to mention merely a few facts.

The aid societies, now more and more assuming the name of the Red Cross, help each other with ever greater frequency. The wars which marked the decline of Turkish hegemony in the Balkans provide many examples of this, such as that of 1877-78 in which the Ottoman Empire was opposed to Russia and her allies.

One point which touches us closely should be mentioned here. Trieste found itself in the middle of the merciful activity brought about by this conflict, for it was in that very city that the International Committee opened an Agency charged with centralizing and forwarding relief from the neutral countries. Its headquarters were at No. 18 (later No. 22) Via Nuova. Its President, Mr. Alexis Paris, was the Swiss Consul in Trieste who was assisted in his difficult task by many of its leading personalities.

The Trieste Agency has another reason for being of interest. Fleeing the enemy, some 150,000 civilian Turks took refuge in Constantinople and were in a condition of complete deprivation. Would the International Committee, instituted to aid the wounded, leave the beaten track, as it had done in 1870 by assisting prisoners of war? The answer is yes! for it thereupon authorized the Trieste Agency to come to the aid of these refugees and this was the first initiative taken by the Red Cross on behalf of civilians...