

The inauguration in Geneva of the Henry Dunant memorial

In 1959 a national subscription was launched in Switzerland to erect a monument in Geneva and at Heiden in memory of the author of *A Memory of Solferino*. A national committee was formed for this purpose of which Mr. Alfred Borel was President and Mr. Max Hochstaetter was Secretary-General.

An article was published in the *International Review* when a memorial was unveiled on October 28, 1962 at Heiden, a village in eastern Switzerland in which Henry Dunant passed his old age and where he died.¹ The memorial which was to be erected in Geneva was inaugurated on May 8, 1963 and presented to the State and City authorities of Geneva at a ceremony which took place in the Bastions gardens.

The memorial, which was the work of the sculptor Jacques Probst, is of bronze, symbolizing assistance given to human suffering.² An angel stretches out an arm as if to protect the world from war. On the left there is a group of figures representing the wounded and on the right another group representing refugees. The marble base bears the following inscription: "*A Henry Dunant 1828-1910, Initiateur de l'œuvre internationale de la Croix-Rouge, Promoteur des Conventions de Genève.*"

The inauguration took place in the presence of the Chief of the Swiss Political Department, Mr. F. T. Wahlen, representing the Federal authorities, a large number of leading personalities of the State and City of Geneva, members of the diplomatic corps and of international organizations established in Geneva, as well as representatives of international and national Red Cross institutions. Members of the Dunant family were also present.

¹ See *International Review*, December 1962.

² *Plate.*

Mr. Borel, in the name of the Geneva Committee, spoke a few words of praise to the sculptor and thanked all those whose generosity had made it possible for a memorial to be placed in honour of Henry Dunant in the town of his birth. Then, after the unveiling, he presented the memorial to the municipal authorities. Mr. P. Bouffard, Administrative Councillor, in reply, assured the donating Committee that the City of Geneva would take care not only of the memorial, but would also "guard the more delicate symbol of the Red Cross which is celebrating its Centenary this year in Geneva and in every corner of the world".

Guests and members of the public then went to the Aula of the University for the commemorative ceremony.¹ Mr. Jean Treina, Vice-President of the Geneva State Council, opened the proceedings by pointing out that the generosity of those who had enabled the memorial to be erected demonstrated the respect and gratitude felt for this far-sighted visionary, which permitted Geneva and Switzerland to play a special international rôle.

Henry Dunant's work thus had wide repercussions. This man all of whose thought was aimed at improving the lot of others, who so intensely felt other men's needs, was the harbinger of the most generous ideas which he showed in his writing and in his words. Taking little care of his own affairs, he was absorbed rather in those of the more unfortunate, the humble, those who were suffering. None of their needs escaped this keen spirit and he always found strangely practical solutions to problems. This dreamer in fact accomplished things. At least, if he was not always able to put his ideas into practice, the age in which we live shows us that the solutions which he suggested had nothing utopian about them. A visionary he certainly was. But his visions were greatly to the point. Listen to the strong words he used, a convinced pacifist and appalled by international rivalries, when addressing himself to the men of his own century. We also would all benefit today from these words :

"Stimulate then your ingenious inventors who perfect their weapons of destruction with such pleasure and enthusiasm! Load them with honours and money! Be rivals as to who can destroy the most beautiful works of art, the pride of civilization. . . . But do not forget that then that civilization of which you are so proud will disappear, and with it your well-being, your trade, your industry, your agriculture, and also perhaps your country's freedom and the happiness of your homes."

¹ *Plate.*

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Memorial inaugurated in Geneva on May 8, 1963

Ceremony on the occasion of the inauguration of the memorial to Henry Dunant



Mr. Wahlen



Mr. Boissier



Mr. Treina

Let this grave warning be heard by each one of us, since it concerns us all. May Henry Dunant's message of friendship be heard throughout the world as has the mission of the Red Cross, which he instigated and which renders his memory imperishable."

Then Mr. F. T. Wahlen, Federal Councillor, delivered the following address :

We are paying tribute today to Henry Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross, to this citizen of Geneva with the generous heart, enthusiastic and profound, to the promoter of this great idea whose universal renown has rebounded for a hundred years on the town of his birth and also on Switzerland.

It is in fact a great honour for our country to have seen the Red Cross born on its soil and to have welcomed the first international conference whose purpose it was to mitigate the sufferings of combatants wounded in the field. Thanks to the 1864 Convention the foundations of humanitarian law were laid.

For the first time in history, so often darkened by war, a glimmer of hope was kindled in the hearts of men. From then on the savagery of battle was to be softened for the soldier who had been struck down, placed hors de combat. His state was to be no longer one of despair, abandoned without aid amongst the dying.

This humanitarian law did not remain a dead letter : two years after its initial codification it was given application during the Austro-Prussian war of 1866. It was then that its merits could be seen by all. In spite of the violence which leads men to fight each other, the Red Cross has for a hundred years defended itself step by step against war. It has never admitted defeat. In 1906 there was the Convention protecting the sick as well as the wounded ; 1929 a new convention, this time relative to prisoners of war, and, finally, in 1949 the Convention for the protection of civilian populations in time of war.

On each occasion fresh instruments brought to international law factors of legal and humane qualities of the widest extent which we know as the Law of Geneva. Ladies and Gentlemen, your City can be proud of having given its name to that law which aims at mitigating suffering and limiting destruction.

Have we not seen, after intervals of twenty years, the strengthening and the spreading throughout the world of the right to protection against the horrors of war? To the twelve signatures affixed to the Convention of 1864 can be added those of some eighty States which today recognize the diplomatic texts of the Geneva institution.

That Dunant drew up this charter here cannot surprise anyone who knows the spirit which has animated Geneva over the centuries : the solicitude for respecting the individual, sensibility over the distress of others, generosity,

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a sense of reality and tenacity. It was natural therefore that this work saw the light of day in such an atmosphere.

The ideas, the ideal which Dunant shared with his fellow citizens, General Dufour, Moynier, Dr. Appia and Dr. Maunoir, to name only the founders, have been adopted over several decades by their Swiss compatriots and by men of goodwill throughout the world. Thus, following a long tradition, the Red Cross has radiated Henry Dunant's principles far beyond our frontiers. Through their universality of purpose they have made a great contribution to our country's reputation abroad.

Switzerland indeed owes much to Henry Dunant. The prestige of the white cross has been enhanced by that of the Red Cross. The Federal Council knows this and I have come here today to tell you, in its name, how much it has at heart to render this tribute of esteem to the memory of the illustrious Genevèse.

Dunant encountered great difficulties; his efforts were not always appreciated as they should have been. But, towards the end of his life, after having been forgotten for so long, he enjoyed the honours which his work merited, to be awarded the Nobel Prize.

For each Swiss, Dunant is both a magnificent and a stimulating example. He shows us that ideas exist which triumph over every obstacle, because they are right. It is not necessary to be powerful for this to happen, they finally impose themselves on all.

Aware of the quality and the greatness of the Red Cross ideal, the whole of Switzerland, through the voice of its authorities, feels it to be its duty today to recall the memory of Henry Dunant, who has deserved well of his country.

Mr. Léopold Boissier, President of the ICRC then spoke as follows :

A tribute which some might consider to be somewhat tardy, has been paid today to the memory of Henry Dunant. This has been skilfully fashioned out of stone and bronze. It has been designed for future generations which will learn that in this city a man was born whose mission it was to persuade other men that there is a limit to violence, which must be halted and contained.

If soldiers have the duty to fight and to kill, a yet higher duty must oblige them to terminate their fighting once the adversary has been wounded or disarmed. From this injunction, which all can understand, has sprung a fertile harvest of principles, laws and rules which constitute what is known as the Red Cross.

Amidst the different religions, philosophies and social doctrines, the Red Cross has appeared as an appeal, then as an engagement calling upon all human beings, whoever or wherever they may be, to struggle against suffering and against death itself.

Has this struggle been victorious ? Certainly the Geneva Conventions, children of that great Genevèse, have saved and will continue to save countless more lives. The International Committee of the Red Cross bears witness to this here.

But this victory of which mankind can well be proud is fragile and endlessly menaced. Science has placed at the service of violence weapons whose powers of destruction continue to increase. If a new war were to break out to-morrow, would another Henry Dunant be found to care for the wounded in their distress calling upon compassionate hearts ?

I am convinced that the miracle of Solferino would be repeated, since the Red Cross will know how to face the reality of the future. Once again it will win the cause of life and of this those who will look upon this monument of the Bastions will be persuaded.

If Henry Dunant launched his appeal a hundred years ago and if he has been heard, this is because he placed his confidence in man who can and must be stronger than the forces of evil. If his contemporaries did not always understand him and if he sometimes felt himself misunderstood and abandoned, he never once doubted his mission. It is this faith and this courage which he bequeathed to the work which he created. In the fierce encounters which have taken place during the past hundred years, his example must have given comfort to many millions of men.

The work has, however, not ceased to expand. Since 1949 it has extended its protection to civilian populations in enemy-occupied territories, to the victims of civil war and it comes to the aid more and more of persons overwhelmed by natural disasters, floods, earthquakes, fire and famine. The National Societies, ever more active, assisting those in every walk of life, struggle against occupational illness and give protection to children and support the aged.

The Red Cross is everywhere present. Its flag, which this year will fly over five continents, belongs to all who give themselves to Henry Dunant's ideal, that spirit which presses onward towards fresh conquests over suffering. This certainty gives comfort and, above all, hope.

Finally, Mr. Bernard Gagnebin, Dean of the Faculty of Letters of Geneva University, made an analysis of Henry Dunant's personality and work in a lecture the text of which can be found at the beginning of our Review.

A reception then followed in the foyer of the Grand Théâtre, where Mr. Dussoix, Mayor of the City of Geneva, greeted the guests of the cantonal and municipal authorities. Dr. Edouard Wyss-Dunant then thanked all those present, the authorities and institutions in the name of Henry Dunant's family.