

B O O K S

A LA RENCONTRE DE HENRY DUNANT¹

by

B. GAGNEBIN and M. GAZAY

“ The moral sense of the importance of human life, the humane desire to lighten a little the torments of all these poor wretches, or restore their shattered courage, the furious and relentless activity which a man summons up at such moments : all these combine to create a kind of energy which gives one a positive craving to relieve as many as one can...”²

These lines, in which Henry Dunant explains his improvised action near the battlefield of Solferino, are the key to the entire man. If, in its misery, all human life, even that of an uncultured trooper, is worthy of our compassion, surely more so was the life of a man who, by his very gesture, then words and ideas, contributed towards the creation of an institution which has brought and continues to bring relief to as many people as possible. He is surely even more worthy of our interest, because, from his life, we can learn a lesson and draw encouragement.

These were the thoughts of Mr. Bernard Gagnebin, Dean of the Faculty of Letters of Geneva University and former librarian of the Henry Dunant Archives, and of Mr. Marc Gazay, Head of the Information Bureau of the League. It was these thoughts which prompted them to present us, on the occasion of the Red Cross Centenary with the publication of *A la rencontre de Henry Dunant*.

It is not an erudite bibliography which they offer us under this title. It is more than that : by a remarkable choice of texts and documents they introduce us to the hero himself, at home, in his private life and his surroundings. Well-chosen plates and unique

¹ Georg, Geneva, 1963. This book is now available in French ; it will shortly appear in English under the title *Encounter with Henry Dunant* with an appendix containing the translation of all the quoted documents.

² *A Memory of Solferino*, American Edition of the American National Red Cross, p. 38.

reproductions of a few pages written by Dunant increase the impression of his "presence", which emanates from this work.

The book is conceived in two parts, preceded by three forewords by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League of Red Cross Societies, and by the Chairman of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross.

"The Destiny of Henry Dunant" is a captivating bibliographical epitome, in which his constant craving to help others is apparent throughout the text and the accompanying reproductions; a craving which grew from his happy childhood, when he is already susceptible to the misfortunes of others, right up to his embittered old age when, still constantly preoccupied with the suffering of man, he continues to search for the means with which to alleviate it. The period which saw the realization of the idea of the Red Cross, its development and its transcription into facts and legal form by the Conferences of 1863 and 1864, naturally takes up more space. Between the illustrations of these happy years and those of old age, drawn-out and solitary at first, then brightened with tributes, the insertion of a piece of paper and the photograph of a passport bring to life in fascinating simplicity the gap of the dark period of his life. It is the gap of those twelve years, during which Dunant, like a forgotten tramp, wanders across Europe, sleeping more often under the arches of a river bridge than in a hotel.

The second part describes "Henry Dunant, the Visionary".

The Red Cross's task, which at the beginning was only concerned with the wounded or the sick of the Armed Forces, was gradually extended to bringing relief to other war victims and then, in time of peace to those of natural disasters, epidemics, etc. According to the degree of necessity, which varies from country to country, there is hardly any form of human suffering which the Red Cross does not endeavour to alleviate and, if possible, to forestall. This extension of its activities, which circumstances slowly imposed on the Red Cross, had been foreseen by Dunant at the very outset, by the logical development of his ideas. Imagining the suffering which meanness, craving for power or ignorance could as yet impose on humanity—in time of peace and in time of war—he saw simultaneously all that which benevolent organi-

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zations could do to remedy it, in the hope of spreading goodwill among men. All this is shown to us here by Mr. Gagnebin and Mr. Gazay, by placing side by side Dunant's writings and the photographs of certain events. We perceive that facts proved the visionary right. We see above all Henry Dunant always alive, in 1963, in his countless relief activities, directly or indirectly linked with the Red Cross. Wherever he is and whatever he does, the gesture of Solferino repeats itself in a constantly more magnified form. As the President of the ICRC says in his foreword : " Thus, all those who will read this book, will love him, for they, in turn, will discover the essence of a unique man who suffered much so that others might suffer less."

F. SIORDET,
Vice-President of the ICRC.

PUBLICATIONS ON HENRY DUNANT AND THE RED CROSS

In answer to requests made by many National Red Cross Societies, the League of Red Cross Societies in Geneva has produced in French and in English a list of publications of general interest, which have appeared in various countries on Henry Dunant and the Red Cross, as well as the principal works written by Henry Dunant himself.

Clearly presented with wide spacing, the authors' names appearing in bold print in the margin, this booklet is in the form of an attractive album which will be of great service to all who are interested in the origins and the history of the Red Cross movement.
