

B O O K S

NO TIME TO KILL¹

by

EVELYN BARK

This book reads like a tale of adventure. There is tragedy and there are also descriptions which glow with an inner light in a strange world newly shattered by disaster.

The author, Miss Evelyn Bark, O.B.E., International Relations and Relief Adviser to the British Red Cross Society, recalls and relives on every page the events and happenings of her life from earliest childhood which moulded her, revealing qualities of a finely-tempered character. The reader is carried along by the writer and shares her moments of happiness and anguish, described in a direct, fast-moving, expressive manner, remarkable for its freshness and simplicity.

In a foreword, H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester, Chairman of the Council of the British Red Cross Society, observes that: "It is encouraging in these days to read the story of someone whose interest in people of all nationalities has made friends for her wherever she goes". Having mentioned her gift for languages and for being able to approach people of every description, he adds: "It was, however, in the Red Cross that she found her *métier* . . . It is equally to the credit of the Red Cross that it assessed her capabilities and made good use of them".

What constitutes the value of Miss Bark's book? The Duke of Gloucester tells us: "Nearly everyone knows something of what the Red Cross does in war time . . . But few people appreciate its ever-growing peace time activities and fewer still know of the international aspects about which Miss Bark has written with the enthusiasm which comes from personal experience. I feel sure that those who read this book will get a far better overall picture of the

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diversity and scope of the Red Cross than from any formal catalogue of its various services to mankind". And speaking of Miss Bark herself: "Miss Bark's life shows a triumph over what at one time appeared to be insuperable odds and it is to her credit that she overcame them".

Indeed, in the first chapter we learn that the author was immobilized in early childhood as the result of an accident; in her inactivity she would let her imagination roam, inventing stories of distant countries, and wanted to learn languages which would later enable her to establish direct contact with people of many different countries. She was able to fulfil these dreams later, after she had recovered, and travelled over the whole world, not as a tourist, but as an apostle of understanding and humaneness, under the protective sign of the Red Cross and in the most trying conditions; this took place after the Second World War, that is to say, when it was no longer a question of killing, but of healing innumerable physical and moral wounds, wherever the war and its aftermath had resulted in submerging millions of human beings in a morass of want, suffering, despair and often hatred.

Thus, for example, we find her, towards the end of the war in Belgium and Holland, and after the war in Germany, especially in Berlin and at Belsen of sinister memory: "When we arrived in Belsen, about 800 people were dying from typhus daily, but within a week the machinery for getting this disease under control was in full swing, and the mortality rate dropped first to about twelve a day and then to zero".

One would like to be able to discuss in far more detail the interest—and indeed, the charm—of this book, and especially to linger over certain chapters, such as the one in which Miss Bark describes with so much simplicity the work of the British Red Cross when it set up its General Headquarters at Vlotho, an attractive village on the Weser, after closing down its office in Brussels when the Belgian Red Cross—as also the Netherlands Red Cross—were able to resume their work under normal conditions.

In the chapter entitled "Babies and Nuremberg", the author tells of some of the most pathetic cases which the capitulation uncovered: those of the foreign children in Germany. Here the writer tried with special tenderness to relieve the wretchedness of

these children and help their repatriation, sometimes accompanying them to their homes, to Paris or elsewhere. Then we find her in Nuremberg at the time of the trials which she describes in a short and very penetrating sketch.

In the chapter "Frontiers Open", the writer tells of some of the work carried out by the British Red Cross in the British Zone of Occupation: "After puffing up a small hairpin drive, one came to a flight of steps—seventy-five of them—leading to the front door. On that warm summer day in 1945 I did not know that this would be my home for the next four years. There were plenty of Germans then who had never heard of Vlotho; but with the coming of the British Red Cross it began to teem with life and developed into a veritable *Mecca*, where members of twenty-three National Red Cross Societies came at different times to visit and consult us."

Having described the spot, its ruins and its "grey-skinned people", the writer gives an account of the tasks which the British Red Cross had to face: thousands of displaced persons, homeless, cold, hungry, abandoned and desperate... Three thousand British-born nationals who had settled in Germany years before... and the whole indigenous population, living in the ruins and air-raid shelters. Hospitals, dispensaries and kitchens had to be set up for all these people.

In charge of the Foreign Relations units of the British Red Cross, Evelyn Bark played an active part in the rebirth of the German Red Cross and in the creation of a Tracing Service. Reading all these chapters on Germany, which constitute a detailed and vivid account of the action undertaken during the years 1945-1950 under the Red Cross emblem, we are made to realize the strong magnetic power which the Red Cross can exert in a chaotic world—and this is not the least of the merits of this book.

A chapter which is particularly moving for the Red Cross world is the one on Count Folke Bernadotte. Evelyn Bark met him for the last time in the summer of 1948, that is, shortly before he was assassinated. She attended the funeral ceremony in Bromma. In heartfelt lines, she depicts the fundamental characteristics of Count Bernadotte, stressing the sympathetic and intellectual qualities which singled him out for the great task which he was fulfilling and from which he was so violently torn.

We follow the writer with unfailing interest in her wonderful and charitable career, which she conjures up very modestly in the chapter "No Day of Rest". She left Germany only to continue her work in other European countries devastated by the war, where she took part in organizing vast relief operations. Later, with the Vice-Chairman of the British Red Cross, the Countess of Limerick, we find her in the USSR, in China and Sweden where her invaluable co-operation helped in establishing contacts between numerous National Societies.

When one comes to analyze this book, one realizes that every episode described by the author, each one in itself a microcosm against the tragic back-cloth of the post-war years, radiates the desire to relieve suffering and to heal—and all this with such a perfect sense of reality and hopefulness, that "No time to kill" can rank amongst the best. One can also say that it is at all times a pleasure to read, thanks to the lively dialogues and the vivid descriptions: the book is illustrated by a large number of photographs.

J. Z.

THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS

by

HENRI COURSIER

This book, which has already appeared in French in a well known series¹, has been translated into English by M.C.S. Phipps of the Translation Section of the International Committee. The English edition will be published in Geneva at the same time as the first number of the English publication of the *Revue internationale*.

¹ Published by the Presses universitaires de France, Paris, in the "Que sais-je?" series, under the title *La Croix-Rouge internationale*.