

BOOKS

We cannot go in more detail into the contents of this interesting work. Let us add, however, that if it illustrates the growth of a National Red Cross Society, it also proves that a spirit of generosity and mutual aid can perform wonders and that it is these wonders which justify the very existence of our movement.

J. Z.

EINER GEGEN ALLE ¹

by

GERHARD SIMSON

This book consists of biographical portraits of five men whose lives were a bitter struggle to assert their ethical ideas: Christian Thomasius was the man who overcame the belief in witches, Georges Picquart won a battle against racial prejudice and from Cesare Lombroso came the notion of crime as predestination, Henry Dunant's story is the tragedy of a friend of mankind, while Fridtjof Nansen's life is the legend of a strong and honest man. Thus, the real interest of this book lies in the way in which the author, by describing men of various callings and different walks of life, succeeds in illustrating his main assertion: that the well-being of mankind can be achieved by ways in which only intelligence and love of justice and humanity count.

Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) spent his life fighting obscurantism. "He threw his profound sense of justice and the whole weight of his enthusiasm and energy into the fight against evil". We shall only mention the names of Picquart and Lombroso here. As for Henry Dunant, numerous articles have appeared in the *Revue internationale* concerning him during the past years, especially recently, on the occasion of the Red Cross Centenary—so many, in fact, that he still and always seems to live among us. However, that in no way diminishes the interest of this book, for

¹ Verlag C. H. Beck, Munich.

in reading it, one realizes that the final word will never have been said about Henry Dunant and there are many aspects of his character which have not yet been fully brought to light.

The author has, indeed, drawn largely on other works already published on Henry Dunant, especially *Solferino, ein Anfang, ein Zeichen, ein Ruf an Alle*¹, but these 75 pages on Dunant are marked by a very personal note : one is aware that the author has succeeded in making a sincere psychological study, a close investigation into the impulses of Dunant's heart and the influences which affected him.

The author is less interested in the external events of Dunant's life than in the effects that various influences had on him, in particular, the religious influence which he experienced from his earliest childhood. The writer devotes several pages to Calvin, the importance of Calvinism in Geneva at that time and its impression on Dunant and those closest to him. As a young man, Dunant was prompted by his religious ideas to participate in humanitarian and social activities. He was a member of an evangelical youth group and founded the Young Men's Christian Association. His actions are often to be traced back to his religious beliefs, influencing him in one way or another. Later on, in Africa, his personal interests did not hold him back from acting according to the dictates of his religious feelings, his " religiöser Aktivismus " ; his faith provided him with an acute sense of the responsibilities of each one of us in the face of human misery ; the injustice and inequality that he saw round about him grieved his extreme sensibility. Writing of Dunant's misfortunes, Gerhard Simson says that if Society was to blame, the author of " A Memory of Solferino " was also to blame.

The author of this biography goes further than giving us a mere recital of facts which combined to make Henry Dunant the promoter of the Red Cross. The main events of his life, especially those which led Dunant to isolate himself in his old age—a further tragic aspect of his life—are generally set out systematically; but they are no more than factors in a situation in which the author tries to show us the hidden mechanism at work in the furthest corners of Dunant's heart. This is where the interest of the book lies.

¹ This book was reviewed in the *Revue internationale* in January 1959.

The last personality Gerhard Simson deals with is another great humanitarian, Fridtjof Nansen. The interest of this study is twofold : in the first place, it familiarizes us with the explorer's life, which is a novel in itself ; and secondly, it makes us relive in all their intensity the tragic events of the first quarter of our century (Fridtjof Nansen died in 1930), the First World War and its disastrous aftermath.

The author begins : " The path which Fridtjof Nansen followed is like a challenge to the time in which we live ", and then, passing on to moral considerations, " A large amount of all human suffering is brought to light in the acceptance of the fact that the hands which hold power are not clean and those that are clean are usually not strong ". Having developed this thought further, and stressed the present-day preoccupation with power and violence, the author describes his hero : " . . . he acted as a champion of the unfortunate and an advocate of peace . . . Fridtjof Nansen was regarded by his contemporaries of the turn of the century as the bravest man of his day : for them, he was the fulfilment of their dreams : a man whose life transcended adventure and danger, fear and weakness, night and death ".

The author presents him to us as the hero, in every sense of the word, of a wonderful epic and a beautiful legend. However, it should be borne in mind that Nansen received an upbringing worthy of what was to be his future : born in 1861, he was the son of a well-to-do family living near Oslo. His father, a lawyer with his heart and soul in his work, demanded of himself and of those around him perfect moderation and absolute loyalty in fulfilling their duty. Nansen received a particularly strict education : " From their earliest childhood, they (his brother Alexander and he) were made to study alone, without help from anybody, manage on a minimum of pocket money, go to school on foot through the snow . . . "

This upbringing made him grow up to be a serious, hardened and remarkably able young man. In addition, he was an enthusiastic sportsman and this helped him later to face the countless dangers he met with on his expeditions to Greenland, the North Pole and on his ship " Fram ". His humanitarian work was no less impressive than his personality. After the First World War he

was appointed High Commissioner for Refugees in the League of Nations and performed an enormous task in the face of great difficulties; millions of refugees were waiting, in indescribably destitute conditions, to be taken care of and to be helped to find security and protection.

For Nansen, the economic problem of the refugees was easy to solve: they had to be given the opportunity to work, and, while waiting for the Nansen passport to be drawn up and recognized, he tried to relieve the misery of their social condition by all the means in his power.

The writer recalls the difficulties which Nansen had to face in fulfilling his vast relief action, and especially in obtaining some form of contribution from the Governments of numerous countries. His life was like a symbol, "a song of love and action, whose pure melody should continue to resound like an irresistible appeal to mankind." We cannot but wholeheartedly join in this wish, hoping that this biography will arouse new energies to continue the fight for mankind.

J. Z.