

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

“BULLETIN” OF THE SOCIÉTÉ HENRY DUNANT¹

In its October 1975 issue, the *International Review of the Red Cross* reported the creation in Geneva of the Société Henry Dunant. This body has now published the first number of its “Bulletin”, which contains news of the Society’s activities and information on plays and television programmes relating to Dunant. It also features a hitherto unpublished letter from Dunant to his faithful friend and confidant, Rudolf Müller, and three articles of exceptional interest.

The first is by Mr. Willy Heudtlass, former head of Red Cross press and radio services in the Federal Republic of Germany, and author of a significant book on Dunant and of several studies which have appeared in the *Review*. He writes of Dunant and his friends in various countries. The second article is by the President of the Society, Mr. Roger Durand, and is entitled « Henry Dunant and his family ». In the third article, Mr. Philippe M. Monnier gives details of the recent acquisition by the public and university library of Geneva of a collection of documents relating to the author of “A Memory of Solferino” and formerly the property of Mr. Manfred Müller, who inherited them from his father, Rudolf Müller.

On the subject of the latter, Mr. Heudtlass writes in his documented article:

“...One of the turning points in Dunant’s life occurred in 1879. While strolling around Stuttgart, he fell into conversation with a young student, Rudolf Müller. Neither of them could have foreseen that they would form a friendship lasting several decades, and that the younger man would play a decisive role in restoring the older one’s reputation. The chance encounter bore its first fruits about thirteen years later. Müller, by then a teacher in a secondary school, published an article on Dunant in the *Ulmer Tagblatt*. Dunant wrote to thank him, and sent him

¹ Geneva, No. 1, 1975.

several documents, saying 'I can send you many more'. So began a relationship of trust between the two men which remained firm to the end of Dunant's life. Unceasingly, the Stuttgart teacher strove to rescue Dunant's reputation. In the Netherlands, he succeeded in interesting the journalist Haje in his efforts. From Zurich, the industrialist J.-J. Bourcart, an old friend of Dunant, offered his services, as, in Stuttgart, did A. Greater, influential member of the Order of the Temple, who had already helped Dunant during his difficult period of exile in Paris. After four years of collaboration, Müller's book, *Entstehungsgeschichte des Roten Kreuzes und der Genfer Konvention* (The Creation of the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention) appeared in 1896. A Dunant foundation set up in Stuttgart, with Müller participating, succeeded in collecting about 25,000 Reichsmarks, which covered most of the printing costs. Some copies were issued as a luxury edition, with gilt-edged pages.

"The book attracted the attention of important personalities in Switzerland and elsewhere. Among them was Professor Leclère, who told Müller that, with the agreement of professors of Brussels University, he had proposed Dunant for the first Nobel Peace Prize at Christiania. But it was on Björnsterne Björnson, member of the Norwegian Nobel Prize Committee, that the book had a decisive influence. At the same time, a fruitful meeting arranged by Dunant took place between Müller and the Norwegian doctor Hans Daae. The latter immediately joined in the efforts being made by Müller for the Nobel Peace Prize to be granted to their friend. Daae met Björnson, and found his compatriot well prepared by his reading of Müller's book, and a supporter of Dunant. The Nobel Committee, however, decided to divide the prize equally between Dunant and the Frenchman Frédéric Passy. Dunant and his two friends accepted this decision, which constituted the vindication they desired."...

The article by Mr. Durand illustrates very clearly that the Dunant family, confronted with the misfortune of one of its members, showed its solidarity in a very definite way. Mr. Durand concludes:

"... Despite the shame brought about by the bankruptcy of 1867 and the material sacrifices entailed, the Dunant family did not turn its back on its great man in his downfall. On the contrary, it supported him.

"When Dunant went into voluntary exile, the family kept in close touch by letter and showed him real affection. Through Pierre-Louis, Henry's brother, the family sent money, in spite of the fact that in Paris Dunant was perpetually in need of funds, always in pursuit of an unattainable ideal. The family provided a life annuity, thanks to the prudent

foresight of an uncle. Above all, it defended his rights when his creditors were attempting to snatch the bread from his mouth.

“Even if there is still some doubt as to how long the payments were made, it is known that Dunant received sums for his personal use from 1874 to 1894, at least. The small but regular income kept away the threat of hunger, during a period in which Dunant was believed to be destitute.

“The family’s support, therefore, had its effects. And Dunant paid tribute to his relatives when, twenty-five years later in 1892, he wrote:

‘I would be happy enough if a new German translation of *A Memory of Solferino* could be printed, as whether for my family’s sake or for the sake of justice itself, I cannot tolerate the injustice that has been done me.’

and thirty years later:

‘I have written to my brother, who has always been very loyal, to ask his advice; I will make the first decision only after having received this advice.’

“Nearly forty-five years later, moreover, he chose his own nephew to act as executor of his will, in a sense making him his spiritual heir. He requested him to make a number of donations. But, far more significant, he left in his personal care his priceless manuscripts, carefully preserved and endlessly rewritten for thirty or perhaps forty years: his final message of international brotherhood to the human race, as it rushed headlong, unknowingly, towards 1914.”

This bulletin will be of interest to everyone concerned with the work and thought of Henry Dunant. We must hope that research will continue, to shed light upon obscure areas in the life of the man who, despite the oppressive bitterness from which he suffered, still had the courage to assert, in *L’Avenir Sanglant*, “We must never allow ourselves to submit to doubt, because doubt is a moral infirmity”.

J.-G. L.