

Mr. CARL J. BURCKHARDT RECEIVES THE GOLD MEDAL OF THE ICRC

The International Committee has awarded its Gold Medal to Mr. Carl J. Burckhardt on the occasion of his 70th birthday in recognition of the eminent services which he has rendered. This high honour had only previously been bestowed upon Mr. Max Huber, Mr. Jacques Chenevière and Miss Lucie Odier.

A member of the ICRC for nearly thirty years and then President for a brief period, Mr. Burckhardt has continued to make available to the Committee advice of rare competence and judgment inspired by high aims and a broad view of events.

The Gold Medal was handed to him on October 12, 1961, during a ceremony which gathered together numerous members of the Committee, the directors and heads of the Organization's departments, as well as several people who had the privilege of working closely with Mr. Burckhardt¹.

The President of the ICRC, Mr. Boissier, spoke of the great merits of this man of action, thinker and writer, and as a friend of his for more than fifty years, recalled some childhood memories and recounted a moving episode which took place when both of them were about fifteen years old.

... Once we met an old beggar who asked us for alms. Without hesitation Carl Burckhardt emptied his purse into his hand and when I expressed astonishment at this generosity, which was depriving him of cakes, he replied "that will give more pleasure to him than to me".

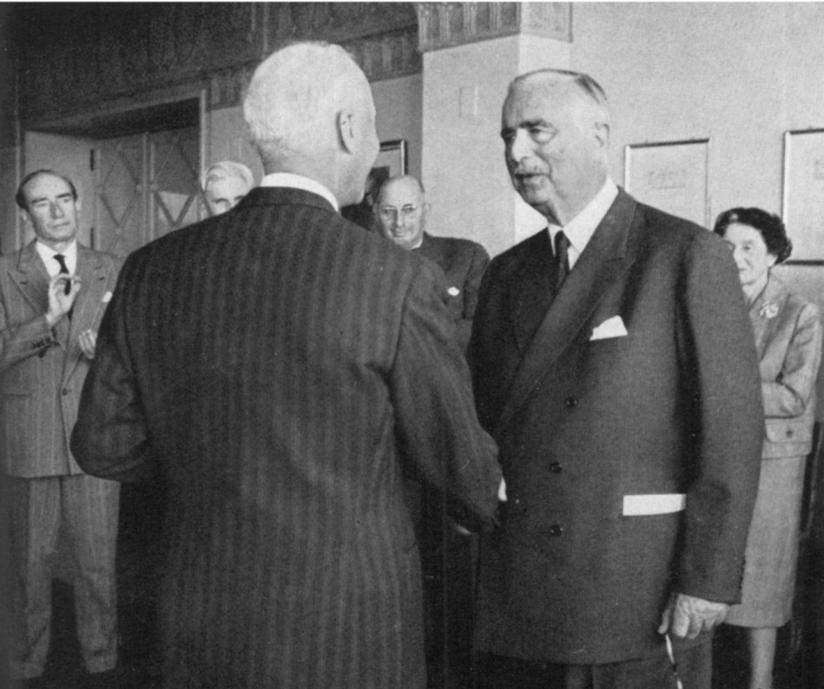
I have not forgotten this small event, in a life which has included so many other events, both big and small; because when Carl Burckhardt has come face to face with men in their suffering, he always has had the same instinctive reaction: to give, because "that will give more pleasure to him than to me".

¹ Plate.



Miss Lucie Odier says a few words on the occasion of her resignation and nomination as honorary Vice President (on the right, Messrs. Jacques Chenevière and Léopold Boissier).

The President, Mr. Boissier hands the gold medal of the ICRC to Mr. Carl J. Burckhardt, ex-President





SAVANAKIET: the Women's Committee of the Laotian Red Cross distributes ICRC relief.

OSLO: Mr. Styren, President of the Norwegian Red Cross (on the right), after handing the Medal of Merit with Palms to the President of the ICRC, Mr. Boissier.



Throughout his career, he has retained an unquenchable human curiosity, a profound intuition and a sympathy not for humanity, because he is not fond of big words and abstractions, but for the man, whoever he may be, in distress, misery and loneliness.

Carl Burckhardt has thus become a most eminent member of the International Committee of the Red Cross, because in all his activities he has remembered that this Committee does not work to obey any particular philosophy but to serve men, individually, each one receiving his share of our Institution's solicitude.

*As far back as 1923, our colleague visited Greek prisoners in Anatolia on the Committee's behalf. One of the results was that little masterpiece entitled *Kleinasiatische Reise*, in which the author shows side by side his divinatory gifts, the enthusiasm and wondrous discoveries of his youth.*

He entered the Committee in 1933 and worked continuously with Mr. Max Huber. During the war, he was active on behalf of the victims of the conflict in Eastern Europe, visited a Soviet prisoner-of-war camp in Germany, concerned himself with the condition of detainees and political deportees, constantly stimulated the work of the Committee in fresh fields of action and devoted all his energy in the sphere of relief where, with the aid of admirably chosen colleagues, he created from nothing a powerful transport and distribution organization whose convoys crossed oceans and frontiers.

He was nominated President on December 4, 1944, but some months later ceded to the request of the Federal Council to assume the post of Swiss Minister in Paris.

He later returned to the Committee to resume his place and to give us with customary modesty, advice which was backed by irreplaceable experience.

Wherever Carl Burckhardt goes he leaves his mark, whether it be in the minds of those who have met him or who have read his writings, or whether it be in the development of organizations with which he has co-operated.

He has continued to make his mark since childhood and I am therefore happy, as a friend and as President, to place in the hands which once gave a few francs' worth of alms to the beggar of Steckborn, the Gold Medal of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Carl Burckhardt replied by recalling the high ideal which inspires the intervention of the Red Cross and which very reason today justifies the existence and action of the Red Cross. He paid tribute to those who lent him their assistance during the war, first and foremost Mr. Max Huber and his ICRC colleagues, as well as those who worked closely with him. His speech was a fine tribute to the idea of the Red Cross and to its lasting value in the world of today, and he ended by saying :

... I would like to tell you of just one of my memories. At the very beginning of 1944, after long and fruitless attempts, we had reached direct contact with Himmler, chief of the Security Service of Hitler's Reich, and for the first time we were able to enter into direct negotiations on the subject of political detainees held in concentration camps, as well as on the subject of the Jews in the hands of the German authorities. Accompanied by Hans Bachmann, I went to Austria, where, in an inn at the foot of the Arlberg, we had discussions lasting several hours with Kaltenbrunner, Himmler's representative. Red Cross history contains the results of that day. I will only say this: Kaltenbrunner signed an agreement according to which a delegate of the International Committee would be admitted to each concentration camp, on the condition that he did not leave this camp until the end of hostilities and that he shared the life of the detainees. On my return to Geneva, I called together the delegates present at our headquarters and I communicated Kaltenbrunner's monstrous proposal to them. With one accord they all, with the exception of those engaged on other urgent tasks, put themselves at our entire disposal, agreeing to share the captivity of those to whom they wished to bring help, having decided at the very moment of the final collapse, to protect them from the vengeance of the vanquished and the desperate. To go into the sequel to this event would be too long a story. What is important is that the example illustrates in a unique manner the morale of our delegates, a morale of which our unforgettable Marcel Junod offered such a shining example.

To my mind, the principal aim of our Organization is to bring practical and rapid aid and all that the realization of this requires, from the diplomatic preparation to the carrying into effect, conditioned by courage and resolution. In my opinion, the Committee should

always guard against influences which would like to turn into a pedagogic organization, a sort of Areopagus of international ethics which everyone can invoke to his own propagandist ends, which everyone can abuse and whose advice and judgment will be profitable to some and harmful to others and in the long run will only serve to strengthen discord. Let us always hold ourselves in readiness and act each time our help is required, but let us never forget our President's remark that for us discretion remains a guiding principle.

It only remains for me to thank you all for the great honour which you have done me today. During my career I was obliged to leave our mutual task, but I knew that I would have successors who combined all the highest qualities. The post-war period required a particular effort to give a more solid basis to our international status and to extend our material bases as well. Today, we find ourselves faced with obligations infinitely wider and more complex than during the first half of the century; they require increased political awareness and they demand from us all unstinted support for the man who, first and foremost, assumes the current responsibilities, and to whom I am happy to be able to express my very real gratitude.
