

M I S C E L L A N E O U S

THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN IN THE BRITISH REALM

We are aware of the links which exist between the Order of St. John and the British Red Cross and their co-operation during the Second World War. We therefore thought that it would be of interest to reproduce an article which appeared in the Johanniter-Orden (No. 2/61) review, recalling the history of that Order and its work in Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

One of the most striking features of the Order of St. John is the way in which its centuries-old tradition of service to the sick and needy is today inspiring in practical form a vigorous organisation devoted to the service of the community.

It is not here intended to deal with the centuries of history which *The Grand Priory in the British Realm of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem* shares with other branches of the Order. Suffice to say, that the headquarters of the Venerable Order, as it is often called for short, are today at St. John's Gate in London, the 16th century gatehouse, which, with the adjacent church, is all that remains of the Priory of Clerkenwell founded in 1144, when the Grand Priory of England originated.

It is from 1831 that the Order in its modern form may be said to date. In that year the Order was revived in England after a long period during which it had existed only in name. The emphasis was now to be on the charitable rather than on the military aspect of the Order. Yet it was the experience of war, notably the Crimean War, the War of Italian Liberation, and the Franco-Prussian War, that inspired the Ambulance work from which sprang the First Aid Movement with which the Order has been particularly associated in

the United Kingdom and overseas. The St. John Ambulance Association was founded in 1877 to teach first aid to the general public. Ten years later, the St. John Ambulance Brigade was formed so as to give first aid certificate holders opportunities for organised active service. Men and women, boys and girls of the Brigade, have become a traditional and essential part of the national life of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth. There are now almost 250,000 members of the Brigade (uniting both Senior and Cadet branches) pledged to serve humanity without regard to race, colour or creed.

Meanwhile, in 1882, the Order realized one of its greatest ambitions, the re-establishment of a link with Jerusalem. This took the form of an Ophthalmic Hospital to deal with the eye diseases which are such a scourge all over the Middle East and Africa.

Through many vicissitudes the Order has maintained a hospital in Jerusalem since that time, and the present institution newly built and opened in October 1960, probably offers the finest treatment for eye diseases in the whole Middle East, with the most up-to-date equipment and a highly trained staff. Perhaps more important, the new hospital embodies a training school for nurses and a research department that has already helped notably towards the discovery of a cure for trachoma.

These then, the Association, the Brigade and the Hospital, are the Order of St. John's three great Foundations which embody in the most practical way its charitable traditions. They operate not only under the direction of the Grand Priory and its Establishments in the United Kingdom and the Colonial Territories, but also through the associated Pories and Commanders in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Rhodesia.

Actually the activities of the Association and the Brigade go beyond First Aid in the strict sense of the word. To deal first with the Association, although 10,000 classes were held in the United Kingdom in 1960 and 110,000 certificates were awarded, a proportion of these were dealing with subjects like hygiene, the clean handling of food, factory first aid, civil defence, and a great many in home nursing. In fact, therefore, the Association trains people—members of the public, the police, railwaymen and miners, as well as members of the Brigade—not only in First Aid but in a number of

allied subjects. To do this they can call upon the services of more than 3,000 practising doctors who are qualified to give instruction in the various subjects.

In addition, the Association every year organises national First Aid competitions for the nationalised industries and other bodies in the United Kingdom, culminating in the Grand Prior's Competition when the best first aid teams in the country meet in London to compete for the supreme prize in the field.

Obviously, there is co-operation between the Association and the Brigade on such matters as examinations and campaigns for the furtherment of First Aid teaching. But it would be fair to say that the name of St. John means to most members of the public the members of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, who are present at all big events to tend anyone who is unfortunate enough to need treatment if an accident happens. The type of function they attend ranges from State occasions like the Coronation, and other public processions, to football matches, theatre performances, or race meetings. In one year they deal with something like half a million cases in Great Britain alone, and of these more than half are not while they are on duty, but everyday incidents that might happen to anybody. Apart from this, emergencies like rail disasters or floods, when large numbers of casualties occur, find them among the first to arrive, although they are probably suffering great personal loss.

These are the activities that are well known, but in addition the Brigade carries out many more duties that do not receive publicity. Among these are air escort duties, when members with special training accompany and look after travellers who are seriously ill ; home nursing of the elderly who cannot look after themselves ; hospital duties as members of the National Hospital Service Reserve ; and membership of the Civil Defence force.

The strength of any movement lies in it's youngest members, and looking toward the future the Brigade has been concerned to create a vigorous Cadet movement, wherein boys and girls from the age of eight upwards can meet, and learn a vast number of interesting things about many subjects, including not only First Aid but other varied crafts ranging from the care of animals to bicycling and from map-reading to firefighting. All are designed to make

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good citizens of the young members and there is a constantly growing link between the adult and the junior branches of the Brigade. This is doing much to establish a sense of continuity and a supply of young recruits so important for the future prosperity of the Brigade.

A chivalrous body such as the Order of St. John, if it is to justify its existence in these days when so many things are measured in purely material terms, must present to the community at large a picture of a modern, active organisation which is doing useful work. By encouraging through all possible means the learning of First Aid, by maintaining the St. John Ambulance Brigade and by developing such services as those given by the Ophthalmic Hospital, the Order of St. John is trying to ensure that its proud motto " Pro Utilitate Homnium " (For the Service of Mankind) will not lack followers who will bear the torch in centuries yet to come.