

THE RED CROSS AND RURAL AREAS

Dr. Lamarche has published an article in the official organ of the French Red Cross, Vie et Bonté, 1962, No. 133, in which he studies the psychological causes of the lack of balance in rural areas. Pointing out that agricultural malaise exists in every country, he says that the Red Cross can remedy this and he goes on to explain how.

We think it will be of interest to reproduce certain passages of this article in order to show that the Red Cross sphere of action is continually extending and that the present extremely rapid development of sociological conditions requires its intervention in wide and varied fields.

The rural world, that reservoir of men and conservator of precious human values is more than ever necessary for the proper equilibrium of humanity. It is therefore imperative that we help it to surmount its crisis, so that it can adapt itself to a scientific civilization without losing its personality. What must be done? And what can the Red Cross do? Before answering these questions it must first of all be stated what must not be done.

1. The rural world must not be assimilated in the industrial world. Agricultural work for example, is not comparable to industrial work. Its rhythm is more irregular and its duration, of necessity, cannot be gauged. Professional life and family life inevitably overlap. The use of vast areas disperses agricultural workers, whilst the factory groups the workers.

2. A solution must not be prescribed without it being known if it can be accepted. New techniques must not be introduced before it is certain that man can adapt himself to them. And uniform financial, economic or social rules must not be imposed under the pretext of convenience, unification or efficacy.

3. That which has remained healthy, such as family life for example, must not be destroyed.

Finally, success or failure must no longer only be judged through financial balance sheets. Land dehumanizes if it is no

longer anything but a means of earning one's living. It is as men that we must seek solutions to the problems which the rapid development of the modern world raises for rural areas.

It is obvious that desirable solutions can only be made to work with the co-operation of the public services, and the understanding of other professional and social groups. But they must be desired and not inflicted. If numerous indispensable reforms, such as reconstitution and installation of group centres adapted to present necessities, the creation of hospitals and schools, the improvement of means of communication, necessitate the intervention of the State or large organizations, those concerned must not only be consulted but must also take part in the work.

What rôle can the Red Cross play ?

1. It must inform the public. It affects all social strata, it owes allegiance to no political party and to no religious or philosophical group, and it is therefore in a particularly good position to accomplish this rôle.
2. It must help the movements already in existence.
3. As it has done elsewhere, it must set up pilot-projects, social services or health centres where the need for these is felt.

Industrial civilization, by creating urban concentrations, has progressively separated the inhabitants of the town from those of the country. They must be reunited and harmonious relations re-established. The rural area, by its contact with nature, must bring to urban society the human values which it has retained.

Scientific civilization must use its techniques to help the rural area without destroying its deep roots; it must free it from its constrictions, give it the means to achieve a higher material, intellectual and cultural level, enable it to overcome its inferiority complex. This, it seems, is one of the most important problems to study. In the second half of the 20th century, at a time when the spread of atomic energy can make human decentralization possible, it must be tackled.