

## A HUNDRED YEARS SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF

### A Memory of Solferino

What do we find at the origin of the work which does most honour to mankind, at the roots of a movement which has been spread across the world for the past hundred years? There is of course one man, Henry Dunant, but there is also a book. A slight volume which was soon to stir the hearts and consciences of Europe from end to end, by its fluent style, its stark reality and its warm-hearted appeal. This was *A Memory of Solferino*.

The promoter of the Red Cross shook his contemporaries by the way in which he described with such force and simplicity the deep distress of the wounded at Castiglione, their great sufferings, which contrasted so vividly with the inadequate measures taken for their relief. But this picture of the horrors of war was not intended to be an end in itself; it opened up the perspective of being able to mitigate the tragic lot of victims of a scourge as old as the world itself. Mere emotion, however, is not enough. It is only by continuous effective action that this objective can show its true quality. It is to Henry Dunant's undying fame that he drew upon his own personal experience to produce consequences of universal importance, to have conceived the bold idea of a relief organization which was to be both international and permanent, and to have had sufficient faith in the possibilities of its realization to have inspired men of goodwill with such a faith and to triumph over all obstacles.

Anyone other than Dunant would perhaps have thought that, after having cared for the wounded of that terrible battle in June 1859 with such energy and devotion, he had done all that was possible, that he had amply fulfilled his duty, and that he could return

to his own affairs. After all, he was not responsible for the war, and how could an obscure individual alter the existing state of things, transform a complex organization and have any influence on the decisions of governments? Dunant, however, had never forgotten the heart-breaking scenes which continued to haunt him ; he did not remain silent in the face of his fellow-men's sufferings, instead, he wrote " A Memory of Solferino ". He took a long time reflecting on his idea in order to give it more weight ; it was in fact not until three and a half years later that the book saw the light of day.

The exact date of its publication has been disputed and for this reason it is thought to be of interest to devote a short article to the subject in this year of commemoration. Documents in the Henry Dunant Archives, in the Manuscript Department of the *Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Genève*, make it possible, however, to determine the date fairly accurately.

It is known that the first important account of the origins of the Red Cross, based on Henry Dunant's memories, appeared in German in Stuttgart in 1897 under the well known title, *Entstehungsgeschichte des Roten Kreuzes und der Genfer Konvention*.<sup>1</sup> Its author, Rudolf Müller, had worked closely with Dunant, who was writing his memoirs at Heiden, which were then translated and freely used by Müller.

Dunant was writing more than twenty years after the events he was describing and one can readily imagine, however good his memory may have been, that he made some slight errors in dates. One of these precisely concerns the date of his book's publication. In one passage of his memoirs, Dunant complains that the committee formed under the auspices of Madame de Gasparin and Mr. Naville, after the war in Italy, did not wish to remain on a permanent basis.<sup>2</sup> He continues : " It was therefore extremely important to strike a great blow in order to produce a work such as that envisaged by Dunant. This was *A Memory of Solferino* which achieved this object which was so greatly desired by its author. He never ceased for a moment from quietly allowing his idea to ripen without being cast down by general indifference or scepticism. He took about a year to

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<sup>1</sup> Translation : *History of the origins of the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention*.

<sup>2</sup> Bibliothèque de Genève, Ms.2078, ff.6-7.

Gansam 27 8<sup>e</sup> 1862

Monsieur

En vous remerciant du plaisir que m'a prouvé votre aimable visite, et en réponse à votre honorable lettre d'avant-hier je vous vous dire :

- 1<sup>o</sup>) vous pourriez porter l'effort autrichien hardiment à 170,000
- 2<sup>o</sup>) mettre environ 500 preux d'artillerie
- 3<sup>o</sup>) et sur le drapeau noir qui indique la blesé.
- 4<sup>o</sup>) vous êtes dans le vrai en

Henry Dunant made use of information given him by F. Lecomte in his book A Memory of Solferino as can be seen on the page of the original edition reproduced everleaf.

plusieurs ne se permirent, pendant plus de vingt-quatre heures, aucun instant de repos ; deux d'entre eux qui étaient à l'ambulance placée sous les ordres du docteur Méry, médecin en chef de la garde, eurent tant de membres à couper et de pansements à faire qu'ils s'évanouirent ; et dans une autre ambulance, un de leurs collègues, épuisé de fatigue, fut obligé, pour pouvoir continuer son office, de se faire soutenir les bras par deux soldats.

Lors d'une bataille un drapeau noir, fixé sur un point élevé, indique ordinairement le poste des blessés ou les ambulances des régiments engagés dans l'action, et par un accord tacite et réciproque on ne tire pas dans ces directions ; quelquefois néanmoins les bombes y arrivent, sans épargner les officiers comptables et les infirmiers, ni les fourgons chargés de pain, de vin, et de viande destinée à faire du bouillon pour les malades. Ceux des soldats blessés qui sont encore capables de marcher, se rendent d'eux-mêmes à ces ambulances volantes ; dans le cas contraire on les transporte au moyen de brancards ou de civières, affaiblis qu'ils sont souvent par des hémorragies et par la privation prolongée de tout secours.

Sur cette vaste étendue de pays si accidentée, de plus de vingt kilomètres de longueur, et après les phases de bouleversement qu'entraînait un conflit aussi gigantesque, soldats, officiers et généraux ne peuvent savoir qu'imparfaitement l'issue de tous les combats qui se sont livrés,

write his book with great diligence and to have it printed,<sup>1</sup> and this work appeared, as we have seen, during the summer of 1862." On the other hand in a letter of July 13, 1904, written in connection with its re-printing, the founder of the Red Cross declares to his nephew, Maurice Dunant : " The first edition appeared in October 1862."

The correspondence received by the author, together with the invoice from the Fick printing house, prove that Dunant was inexact on these two counts ; but he cannot, I maintain, be blamed for this. When did the manuscript actually reach the printers? We do not know the exact date, it must no doubt have been during the course of the summer. On the other hand we do know that Dunant was still correcting the proofs of his book in October. He then submitted them to General Dufour for his comments, who replied on October 19 : " I have read the sheets which you have sent me with great interest. I entirely approve of their contents which I consider to be a most useful addition to the military accounts of the last Italian campaign." Henry Dunant who had not been present at the Battle of Solferino thought it was necessary, however, to describe it briefly by way of an introduction to relating his own personal impressions and the painful scenes he had witnessed, and the first forty pages of his book deal with this " military account " to which General Dufour was referring.

He also sent the proofs to Colonel Ferdinand Lecomte, of the Canton de Vaud, author of a *Relation historique et critique de la campagne d'Italie en 1859*, asking for further information. A letter of October 27, 1862 from Lecomte shows us that Dunant was still then correcting his text, since he included, in the first edition, the points made by his correspondent. Based on this information he put the number of one hundred and seventy thousand men, supported by approximately five hundred pieces of artillery, as the effective strength of the Austrian force in the battle line.<sup>2</sup> Lecomte also informed him that black flags were used to mark first-aid posts. Dunant made use of this fact by observing : " During a battle a black flag from a high place is the usual means of showing the loca-

<sup>1</sup> " By the well known firm of Fick of Geneva, successors throughout the ages of the famous Genevese house of Tournes." (Note by Henry Dunant.)

<sup>2</sup> See *A Memory of Solferino*, p. 6, translation of the original edition.

tion of first-aid posts or field ambulances.”<sup>1</sup> It was therefore not before the end of October that the work was passed for the press. After that, 1600 copies were soon printed some of which were with bindings. On November 8 the firm of Fick submitted the following invoice :

*Jules-Gme Fick*

*Geneva, November 8, 1862*

*Supplied to Mr. Henri Dunant*

*1862 November 1600 copies, Printing and make-up*

<i>Un Souvenir de Solférino containing 8 fly-leaves including 3 insets 120 frs. . . . .</i>	<i>960.—</i>
<i>342 hours for author's corrections 75 ct. . . . .</i>	<i>256,50</i>
<i>400 title-pages 10 frs. per 100 . . . . .</i>	<i>40.—</i>
<i>800 covers 8 frs. per 100 including paper . . . . .</i>	<i>64.—</i>
<i>24 reams 1/2 long royal semi-fine 36 frs. per ream . . . . .</i>	<i>882.—</i>
<i>4 ditto super-royal 70 frs. per ream . . . . .</i>	<i>2482,50</i>
	<hr style="width: 100%;"/>
	<i>75.—</i>
	<hr style="width: 100%;"/>
	<i>2407,50</i>

*Received the sum of two thousand four hundred and eighty francs,  
Geneva, November 12 in payment.*

*(signed) Jules FICK*

One can clearly see from this how many corrections were made in the proofs: alterations made by the author amounted to 342 hours' work. Until the very last moment Dunant rectified or defined points of detail in the first part of his work. He was probably in possession of a certain number of copies already on November 8, which he could have sent immediately to a few people. We are at

<sup>1</sup> *Plate.*

See *A Memory of Solferino*, p. 20, translation of the original edition. In another letter dated November 17, Lecomte pointed out that if hospitals flew black flags, ambulances had red banners.

least inclined to think this from a passage in one of Dunant's letters : " On October 10, 1862, I was thanked by Madame Pauline Micheli, née Revilliod, on her husband's behalf and on her own, for having sent the book *A Memory of Solferino*." Once again he seems to have been mistaken by a month and one should really read " *November 10, 1862* " instead, which would have been the earliest possible date for sending such thanks. However that may be on this particular point, one thing is certain, Dunant lost no time in sending his book to his numerous friends and acquaintances.

Wishing to spread his great idea around and thus hoping to find many adherents, Dunant arranged for the book to be widely distributed in his own circle. This is brought out on the title-page with its caption of *Not for sale*. Results were not long in following. On November 13, Captain Müller thanks him in the following terms : " I want straight away to express all the pleasure I felt on receiving your book. I propose re-reading with my wife a work (I read it straight through yesterday) which will remind us of the moving accounts of the author." On the 15th. Dunant received a whole series of letters, from Max Perrot, founder of the Christian Unions, from the philosopher Ernest Naville, from Petit-Senn, the poet, followed by many others.

Dunant began by distributing his book first of all in Geneva. A little later he sent it abroad and decided to place a second edition on sale. One will in fact have noticed that, on the invoice of November 8, out of 1600 copies only 400 title-pages were printed. In December he instructed Fick to print a thousand title-pages indicating the issue of a *Second Edition* in substitution for the caption of *Not for sale*. Furthermore, these sheets bore the names of distributing booksellers in Geneva, Paris, Turin, St. Petersburg and Leipzig.

After this new title-page, he wrote, on an unnumbered page, a foreword as follows : " Since this work was not originally intended for publicity, the first edition was not for sale. However, the author having received requests from many different quarters, has now been obliged to agree to a re-issue. By making the book available to the public, the author hopes moreover the better to achieve his object, and concerning which he now complies with the numerous requests which he has received." These two pages, which are

peculiar to the second edition bibliographically, were in fact merely stitched above the copies of the first issue which were still in the hands of the printers.

At the beginning of 1863, it was thought necessary to issue a third edition. In this, there was a new make-up with smaller characters and of a reduced size. 3000 copies of this re-issue, still at the author's expense, were printed by Fick in February. Dunant also added a few notes, in one of which can be found the famous proposal to make use of relief societies in time of peace, "during periods of epidemics or in disasters such as floods and fires . . ."

Thus by February 9, 1863, at the meeting of the Public Welfare Society of Geneva, at which the conclusions of *A Memory of Solferino* were examined, Dunant's work, with a mere three months of existence, had already had a wide circulation and had exercised a deep influence. Henry Dunant's appeal was heard and the way was now open in a few months' time for the creation of the Red Cross and, in less than two years, for the signing of the First Geneva Convention. It was well worth recalling once more, the remarkable effect this book has had, when we celebrate in this month of November 1962, the centenary of its publication.

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