

Castiglione and the International Museum of the Red Cross visited

In his book *A Memory of Solferino*, Henry Dunant vividly communicates his emotion to the reader when he describes the relentless development of the battle between the French and Sardinian armies and the Austrian forces. But he shows in the second part of the book the wide-spread feeling, in the face of so much misery, which stirred the people from Mantua to Milan and Turin during those June and July days of 1859.

In vivid and fluent style he describes the charitable impulse which moved the inhabitants of Bergamo, Cremona, Lonato, Desenzano, Pozzolengo, Cavriana and many other places. He writes that "the population of Brescia, which is a town of 40,000 inhabitants, was all at once practically doubled by the arrival of over 30,000 sick and wounded, of which nearly 20,000 were men of the Franco-Sardinian Army" and, at Milan, "the wounded arrived at the rate of one thousand every night for several nights running".

He also says that "all the towns in Lombardy made it a point of honour to claim their share of wounded men" and he adds, "every church, convent, public square, court, street or pathway in these villages was turned into a temporary hospital."

But it was the experience of Castiglione delle Stiviere which had a decisive effect on him. The overcrowding was indescribable. This town which at the time had five thousand three hundred inhabitants "was completely transformed", writes Dunant, "into a vast improvised hospital for French and Austrians". He notes that,

here as in Brescia, yesterday's enemies were now cared for in the same hospitals. They found themselves "stretched out on straw in the streets, courtyards and squares and, here and there wooden shelters had been thrown up or pieces of cloth stretched, so that the wounded pouring in from all directions might have a little shelter from the sun. Men of all nations lay side by side on the flagstone floors of the churches of Castiglione—Frenchmen and Arabs, German and Slavs" and it was this equality in suffering which most struck Dunant. Everybody was equal. . . .

Faced with so much grief, what could be produced to care for so many victims? Goodwill and still more goodwill! Men, women and children did everything possible but they were snowed under and, in their charity, went beyond their human strength. For, as Dunant says "the number of convoys of wounded increased to such proportions that the local authorities, the townspeople and the troops left in Castiglione were absolutely incapable of dealing with all the suffering".

The voluntary helpers "withdrew one by one, for they could no longer bear to look upon suffering which they could do so little to relieve."

Too many people, discouraged at not being able to do more, faced with so many victims, are inclined to say: "what is the use?", turn away and leave, because they have not understood clearly enough the appeal which, from that time onwards, the Red Cross has proclaimed far and wide—that every being has his value and, even if one person only is saved, it is worth the trouble of devoting oneself entirely to one's task for days and nights without respite.

But one must have doctors, nurses, medicines and lint at one's disposal.¹ Dunant noticed this when order was slowly restored in Castiglione. "... Services began to function regularly. The crowding was not to be imputed to bad organization or lack of foresight on

¹ In this respect, mention should be made of one of the outstanding men of the Italian « Risorgimento », Giuseppe Finzi who, in 1859, was special commissioner for the freed territories and who, in this capacity, devoted himself in the most energetic and effective manner to assisting the wounded of Solferino and to organizing the hospitals which were receiving them. See *Giuseppe Finzi, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, Mantova 1959.*

the part of the administrative service, but was the consequence of the unheard-of and unexpected number of the wounded and the relatively very small effectives of doctors, helpers and orderlies ”.

From this observation sprang his famous proposal which is the fountain spring of the Red Cross : “ Would it not be possible to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in war time ? ” This extraordinary intuition of his manifested itself in Castiglione, for it was here that he saw the lack of organization and the misfortunes which resulted. But pointing out immediately the overwhelming impulse of charity which moved the inhabitants of this small city he thenceforward believed in the prodigious resources of the human heart thus evident, and proposed that the relief societies should be *voluntary*.

Only when the spirit is deeply moved is it possible to overcome fatigue and disgust at purulent sores “ in the midst of vile, nauseating odours ”. “ For work of this kind ”, Dunant adds “ paid help is not what is wanted. Only too often hospital orderlies working for hire grow harsh or give up their work in disgust or become tired and lazy ”. Remembering the women of Castiglione, the innumerable acts of relief which he had witnessed in the towns and countryside of Lombardy and voicing the philanthropic feelings which were to inspire the societies whose foundation he foresaw, Dunant was able to conclude on a note of confidence : “ Spontaneous devotion of this kind is more easily to be found than one is inclined to think ”.

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It is evident, from Dunant’s descriptions, that the whole town of Castiglione awoke to action during those tragic days of 1859 and *Tutti fratelli* reverberated like a password of charity. The inhabitants had transported the wounded as best they could to houses, churches and shops. The women prepared lint and bandages whilst the men went in search of more wounded and packed them into the churches, which were soon filled to overflowing. The wounded were then laid in the streets, the squares and the orchards and their number very soon surpassed the population of Castiglione itself. The latter fraternized with the Italian, French and Austrian soldiers

and the priest of Castiglione—Don Lorenzo Barzizza—lent his aid to the improvised helpers, guiding them tirelessly.

This was the scene which greeted Henry Dunant, "the simple tourist" on his arrival in Castiglione. Walking through the streets and squares filled with wounded and with women tending them, hearing groans coming from the houses which he passed, he had the sudden feeling, in this workshop of charity, before this unparalleled spectacle of one small town becoming an immense hospital, that something must be done, must be arranged, must be thought of. Perhaps he had a vision of what was shortly to become the Red Cross before he stepped in and made himself a voluntary nurse.

For he observed the miracles which could be accomplished by the feeling of human solidarity sweeping over thousands of men and women. The children too were filled with pity. "The boys of the neighbourhood" writes Dunant "ran back and forth between the churches and the nearest fountains with buckets, canteens and watering-pots". However, this did not prevent him from seeing only too clearly that improvisation does not solve every problem, since deficiencies, the over-worked administrative services and the lack of medicine and bandages were everywhere in evidence.

The main church of Castiglione is Saint-Louis de Gonzague (San Luigi), and it was undoubtedly here that the greatest number of wounded lay, since it is flanked by a cloister where the victims of the battle were also placed. The church was built in the 17th century by François de Gonzague in memory of his brother, whose relics lie in the sanctuary, which has since become a place of pilgrimage. St. Louis de Gonzague died in Rome from contracting the plague when looking after the sick during a big epidemic. The church, generally called *Santuario* in the district, is a huge building in baroque style, whose high cupola is spiral, not round, and contains remarkable works of art.

But there are five other churches in Castiglione, Our Lady of the Rosary (Rosario), St. Joseph, St. Francis and those called "Chiesa della Buona Morte" and "Chiesa Maggiore". All six of them were already serving as hospitals when Dunant arrived, but it was in the latter where his enthusiasm was most actively employed and close to which, moreover, he stayed. "I sought to organize as best I could", he writes, "relief in the quarters where it seemed to

be most lacking and I adopted in particular one of the Castiglione churches on a height on the left coming from Brescia and called, I think, the Chiesa Maggiore ”.

Built in the 18th century in neo-classical style with an admixture of baroque, the Chiesa Maggiore, also called The Dome (Il Duomo), is a huge building, the interior of which is in the form of a Latin cross. Stout pillars support the central vault, which is composed of several small cupolas. On the walls there are valuable pictures by Italian painters of the 17th and 18th centuries. The church is certainly vast but it is difficult to imagine that nearly five hundred soldiers were piled in there as Dunant says, adding “ One hundred more lay outside on straw in front of the church with strips of canvas to protect them from the sun.”

In fact, the Chiesa Maggiore opens on to a vast esplanade surrounded by cypress trees and a magnificent marble balustrade. Here, opposite the church, stands the Pietà Rondanini, a replica of Michelangelo’s unfinished work, the original of which is in Milan.¹ Erected on the occasion of the centenary of the idea of the Red Cross by a Committee in Castiglione, this monument bears on its pedestal these few words, immortal in their brevity and because they were so manifestly upheld : *Tutti fratelli*, 1959.

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From the Chiesa Maggiore, one must cross Castiglione by Ugo Dallo Square and Hospital Road (via Ospedale) to reach the International Museum of the Red Cross, a symbolic journey, since every step is marked by important reminders of the history of the Red Cross.

Leaving the esplanade which overlooks the surrounding countryside and from where the view stretches towards Solferino and St. Martin², one finds on the left the house where Dunant stayed. A patrician residence, the Bondoni Palace belonged a hundred years

¹ The *Revue internationale* recalled in July, 1959 the circumstances in which this monument was unveiled.

² An article by Mr. Willy Heudtlass on these two towns, and the pilgrimage which he made to them appeared in the June, 1959, issue of the *Revue internationale* (French edition).

ago to the Pastorio sisters, who gave invaluable help to " the man in white " as the wounded called him when he moved amongst them, his pockets full of cigars.

On June 27, 1959, a commemorative inscription was placed on the front of the house reading ¹ :

*In questa casa
nei giorni successivi alla battaglia del 24 giugno 1859
ebbe dimora*

HENRY DUNANT

*animatore nel vicino duomo
dell'opera popolare di soccorso ai feriti di ogni nazione
trasse dal civico slancio di carità*

l'idea fondatrice della Croce Rossa Internazionale

Giugno 1859 — Giugno 1959

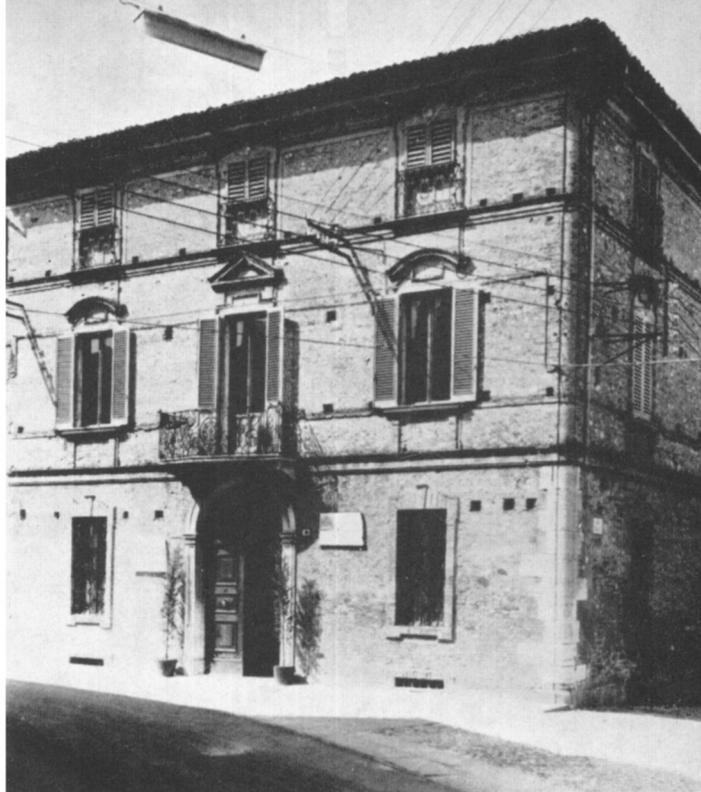
Passing the church of St. Louis de Gonzague and its cloister, one comes to a building, now a carabinieri barracks, on which there is a plaque reminding one that the French general Auger died here. Dunant describes in his book how the general's shoulder was shattered by a bullet. He was taken to Castiglione where he died following an operation. There is a monument to his memory beside the churchyard but, in fact, his body lies in Castiglione.

Continuing on our way, we reach the heart of the town, Ugo Dallo Square, in the centre of which stands the statue of a young girl, who was killed by some soldiers for refusing to give herself to them. On another column there is a statue of St. Michael, the defender of justice, holding scales in one hand and a sword in the other, and opposite stands the house on which the Committee set up in Castiglione for the celebration of the idea of the Red Cross placed a plaque bearing the following inscription ²:

¹ " In this house, in the days following the battle of June 24, 1859, lived Henry Dunant who, in the neighbouring church, took charge of the care of the wounded of all nations and in whom the most noble impulse of charity inspired the original idea of the Red Cross. June 1859-June 1959 ".

² But the women of Castiglione seeing that I made no distinction between nationalities, followed my example, showing the same kindness to all these men whose origins were so different, and all of whom were foreigners to them: " Tutti fratelli ", they repeated feelingly. All honour to these compassionate women, to these girls of Castiglione ! "

J. H. Dunant: *A Memory of Solferino*

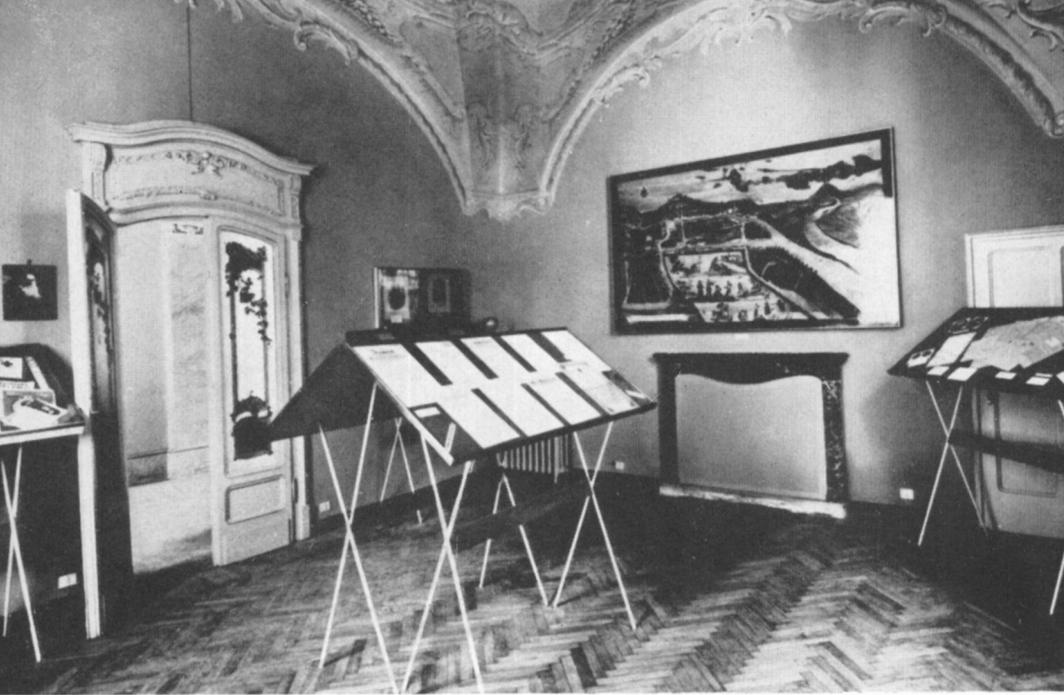


The entrance...

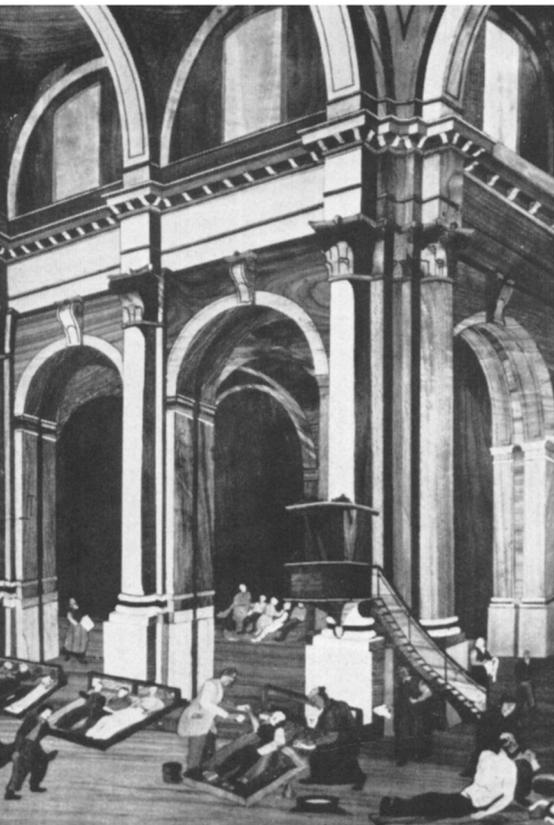
**THE INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE RED CROSS
at Castiglione delle Stiviere**

and the garden (left, medical equipment of the Italian Red Cross).





A room in the Museum



*Dunant and Barzizza
in the Chiesa Maggiore
(Wood panel by G. Pancera).*

... Mais les femmes de Castiglione, voyant que je ne fais aucune distinction de nationalité, suivent mon exemple en témoignant la même bienveillance à tous ces hommes d'origines si diverses, et qui leur sont tous également étrangers : Tutti fratelli, répétaient-elles avec émotion. Honneur à ces femmes compatissantes, à ces jeunes filles de Castiglione !

J. H. Dunant : Un souvenir de Solferino.

Thus we have the spectacle of charity facing justice. Turning to the right and passing between them, one soon reaches the church of Famedio, also called the Madonna of the Rosary (Rosario). Now deconsecrated, its vaults once echoed with the calls and pleas of the wounded of Solferino and on its walls is the following inscription ¹:

*Dans cette église
comme dans toutes les églises de Castiglione
au lendemain de la sanglante
bataille de Solferino
Henry DUNANT
citoyen de Genève
(1828-1910)
secourut les blessés des armées adverses
avec une même compassion fraternelle.
De cela est née l'œuvre universelle
de la Croix-Rouge.
« Tutti fratelli »*

25 juin 1859

25 juin 1949

Hommage — Croix-Rouge — Genève

This plaque, a gift from the ICRC, was unveiled on June 25, 1949 before numerous personalities from Geneva, neighbouring Italian towns and the authorities of Castiglione, together with a large part of the population ².

¹ In this church, as in all the churches of Castiglione following the bloody battle of Solferino, Henry Dunant, citizen of Geneva, 1829-1910, tended the wounded of the opposing armies with the same fraternal compassion. From this was born the universal work of the Red Cross.

"Tutti fratelli", June 25, 1859-June 25, 1949. Tribute of the Red Cross - Geneva.

² Mr. Adolphe Dunant and Mr. Robert Dunant, nephew and great-nephew of the author of *A Memory of Solferino*, were also at the ceremony which was attended by members of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and the Italian Red Cross.

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Finally, one comes to the International Museum of the Red Cross, which is installed in a fine-looking building, the Longhi Palace, so called because it was once the residence of the lawyer Silvio Longhi, an eminent figure in Italian criminal law ¹. From the entrance, one can admire the beautiful proportions of the rooms with their wrought ceilings which open to right and left into a vast hall, at the end of which is a door giving access to a luxuriant garden.

The room on the right contains show-cases in which are displayed papers connected with Henry Dunant and the Red Cross. There are works published by Dunant, such as the *Memorandum on the present state of treatment of negroes (1875)*, the *Report submitted to the International Conference of the first Societies for Relief to wounded members of armies and navies (1867)* and excerpts of his unpublished work entitled "How I founded the Red Cross". Still more papers, some of which have been contributed by the Geneva Public and University Library, are exhibited, surrounded by photographs of Dunant at all ages. It should also be pointed out that there are reproductions of the documents regarding the award of the first Nobel Peace Prize to Dunant and Passy, philatelic blocks from numerous countries showing postal issues devoted to the founder of the Red Cross, and various ICRC and League publications on the occasion of the Centenary of the idea of the Red Cross.

In the room on the left there are also show-cases containing originals or photocopies of documents connected with the foundation of the Red Cross: a letter from General Dufour approving Dunant's initiative, letters to Dunant from sovereigns thanking him for sending *A Memory of Solferino*, and a letter which Florence Nightingale sent to Dunant in 1863, in which she approves his idea, but raises certain objections. Mention should also be made of several pages of *A Memory of Solferino* in Dunant's own handwriting. Full of alterations, they are an excellent example of the author's conscious endeavour to formulate his ideas in a more simple, direct manner and to make the descriptions more vivid

¹ *Plate.*

by amplifying certain details and by deleting others of which he is perhaps no longer certain.

There is also a bill dated November 8, 1862 from the printer of *A Memory of Solferino* and a copy of the book with certain pages in Dunant's own hand. The immediate and universal interest which the book excited is readily seen from the foreign editions on display in Spanish, Japanese, Norwegian, English, Esperanto, German and Danish. The third room on the ground-floor contains reproductions of texts which recall the foundation of the Red Cross and give evidence of the events which preceded and followed the signature of the First Geneva Convention.

In the entrance hall there is a painting by Pontremoli depicting the flight of the wounded towards Castiglione on June 25, 1859, while on the first floor there are two works of art, one by the sculptor E. Mutti, representing a first aid parachutist, which is noteworthy for its vivid clarity of movement, and the other by the sculptor C. Brigoni, whose subject is a woman of Castiglione carrying buckets of water for the wounded of Solferino.

On this floor the rooms are more particularly devoted to the hectic days through which Castiglione lived during June and July, 1859 and the birth of the Red Cross in Italy. Here, one can see documents which are testimony to the fact that the inhabitants of Castiglione were unanimous in their desire to receive and care for the unfortunate wounded, whether they be French, Italian or Austrian. There is a list of twelve hospitals hurriedly organized during those historic days—pages from the register of sick and wounded in the hospitals—the parish book of names of troops who had died, amongst which is General Auger's name—a letter from the parish of Leno to the Hospital Commission of Castiglione announcing the dispatch of eleven carriages given by the population for transporting the wounded—free passes for the transport of wounded from Castiglione to Brescia, signed by the "Civica Commissione della Sussistenza militare" at Brescia.

Further evidence and portraits give us a picture of several eminent citizens of Castiglione who were most anxious to serve and who did so most effectively during those grim days; for instance the "Brevet de chevalier de la Légion d'honneur" conferred by Napoleon III on Lorenzo Barzizza, the priest, for his care of French

wounded. This man presided over the Committee set up to organize temporary hospitals in Castiglione and it was in this connection that a letter of thanks, which figures here, was sent to him by French troops. There are portraits of the Pastorio sisters, Dунant's hostesses, who served the latter as interpreters and helped him to nurse the wounded in the Chiesa Maggiore—portraits of Mother Cantoni, whose devotion was praised by the French Imperial authorities and many other "voluntary hospitaliers".

Two wood panels should also be noted, an astonishing work of marquetry by the artist G. Pancera, one of which represents the battle of Solferino and the other Henry Dunant and Don Lorenzo Barzizza nursing the wounded in the Chiesa Maggiore.¹

The second room on the first floor has a display of documents connected with the setting up in Italy of the first committees of the Red Cross. They are of particular interest, since the Italian Red Cross is one of the oldest Societies, as can be seen from a document which is in the ICRC archives and a photocopy of which figures here. It is a letter sent from Milan to "l'honorable Présidence du Comité international de secours pour les militaires blessés, etc., etc., à Genève", on March 13, 1865 on headed paper already bearing a red cross and the title "Associazione italiana di soccorso dei militari feriti e malati in tempo di guerra, Comitato milanese". This letter announces "the permanent setting up of the Milanese Committee of the Italian Association for the aid to wounded troops".

Photocopies of still more letters and extracts of the ICRC archives are displayed in chronological order and give visitors an opportunity to follow the development of the Italian Red Cross. For example, the constituent rights of the various local committees and of the central committee of the Italian Red Cross, are on display.

Returning to the entrance hall one descends a few steps on the right to the garden.¹ Beneath the vaults and roofs of the outhouses there are numerous exhibits and drawings of Italian Red Cross medical equipment: 19th century ambulances, drawings of First World War hospital trains, folding barrows for transporting the

¹ *Plate.*

wounded. There are also stretchers which were used to transport the seriously wounded to Castiglione from the battles of Solferino and St. Martin.

Leaving the Museum and returning to the peaceful little town and the smiling welcome of its inhabitants, it is impossible not to feel encouraged and, moreover, confident in the lasting value of such a great humanitarian work. The Red Cross first saw the light of day in these streets, these churches, these squares. From this beginning it has conquered the entire world in the space of one century and it is the vision of one man, Henry Dunant, and his book, *A Memory of Solferino*, which has made it possible. But it was also, in common with so many towns of Lombardy, the warmth of feeling of the inhabitants of Castiglione delle Stiviere, whose descendants live surrounded by these proud memories and have founded the International Museum of the Red Cross which bears witness to them.

J.-G. LOSSIER