

## A GLANCE THROUGH THE REVIEWS

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This issue of the official organ of the League of Red Cross Societies is entirely devoted to Latin America and the VIIth Inter-American Conference which took place in Puerto-Rico last November.

Under the title of "The Red Cross, a factor of progress in Latin America", it presents a short textual and photographic account of the characteristics of this vast continent from the ethnic, social, cultural and demographic point of view. The striking contrasts contained in the fine photographs of this issue are a reminder that this continent has found itself at the crossroads of three civilizations. In fact, the traces of former empires rub shoulders with the 20th Century characterized by the development of agriculture with its modern equipment, the fight against illiteracy and disease, or health education, which is precisely where "the work of the Red Cross, a factor of progress", comes in.

Thus, disease is opposed by a charitable health action carried out theoretically and practically by the members of National Red Cross Societies of South America which "are the oldest Red Cross Societies in existence outside Europe". There are more photographs showing these Red Cross workers on the job: first-aid, which gave birth to highway first-aid services and water safety programmes, emergency relief, nursing, home nursing, blood transfusion, etc. The action of the National Societies of these countries is seconded "by an army of back-room workers" in work rooms, reception centres, relief distribution services and hospitals.

This issue also contains two articles which bring a serious note to the study of questions which are both psychological and historical by nature. The first, by Mr. Henrik Beer, Secretary-General of the League, entitled "For whom the bell tolls" tackles the problem of the community spirit and solidarity which, with the development of world relations, must reign between peoples and, what is most important, within the National Red Cross Societies. We reproduce the main passages of this article:

"As crystallised by the Red Cross principles, the only criterion for humanitarian action is that of the need of each individual, regardless of political or geographic factors.

It is, however, an inescapable fact, which not even the Red Cross can overlook, that problems differ in different parts of the world and that to judge what the rôle of the Red Cross must be in each case involves a knowledge not only of languages but also of politics, economics and

social conditions. A standard Red Cross solution will never exist and we must find an individual answer for each special problem.

The tendency at one time of many of the more prosperous parts of the world to concentrate on a final solution for their own problems before beginning to consider those of other regions, has now largely disappeared. Today this isolationist approach has been replaced by a growing awareness of the world as a community : we are realising more and more that whatever happens anywhere in the world is of direct concern to all of us. We feel the importance for our own times of the words of the 17th century English poet, John Donne : ' Never send to know for whom the bell tolls—it tolls for thee '.

Faced with a changing scene whose every event affects the course of Red Cross work, National Societies have a special responsibility to adapt themselves to the new circumstances. If, too, we want to make our concept of the universality of humanitarian problems into a reality then the present evolution in Latin America is of vital interest to the whole Red Cross movement.

We must be aware not only of the natural disasters which so frequently strike this region but also of developments in the social and medical spheres, in order to be able to demonstrate effectively the solidarity of the Red Cross world."

Continuing his idea, the author observes that this collapse of barriers which isolated countries has had the effect of creating, within the National Red Cross Societies, particularly in Latin America, a need for solidarity. He sees visible proof of this in the meeting of the VIIth Inter-American Conference dealing with " The fundamental principles and the practical aspects of developing Red Cross services ". The author concludes his article by saying :

" It is our hope that this meeting will prove to be an important signpost for the Red Cross in the Americas, and especially in Latin America. Wherever possible the League will place its resources and technical knowledge at the disposal of these Societies, but we know that they in their turn have a vital contribution to make, of close acquaintance and understanding of the problems to be tackled. It is only by means of a two-way exchange of help that we can achieve success in our joint efforts to put the Red Cross in its rightful and responsible place on the Latin American continent."

The second article entitled " An inter-American tradition—40 years of regional Red Cross conferences " is by Mr. de Rueda, League Adviser on Latin American Affairs. In a short introduction, the author recalls the doctrine of the Red Cross that is to say " that the Red Cross must essentially and basically be ONE " and that, in this condition of unity, it pursues one aim alone, the very foundation for all its actions, ". . . to combat suffering and save human lives. It demands that man should be treated humanely in all circumstances." He then goes on to recall that

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the line of conduct of the Spanish-speaking Societies is in harmony with the principles of the Red Cross, principles which Mr. Pictet has explained in a book essential to our movement.

Speaking of the Puerto-Rico Conference, the author reminds us of "the forty-year old tradition of the Latin American Societies, manifested at various meetings, of taking valuable decisions not only for the South American continent, but for the Red Cross movement in general". Finally, after mentioning the numerous bonds which unite these Red Cross Societies, contacts born of a common action during natural or other disasters, Mr. de Rueda concludes by saying: "I can affirm with pride that not only do the Red Cross Societies of the Americas testify to a remarkable spiritual maturity in the conception of their activities, but their initiatives and the resolutions adopted by the various Inter-American Conferences constitute an important advance, in every sphere of Red Cross work."

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