

CENTENARY

OF THE

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

On February 17, 1863, the Committee of five members appointed some days previously by the Public Welfare Society of Geneva to study the conclusions of a recently published work, A Memory of Solferino, met in Geneva. The International Committee of the Red Cross, because the Committee was soon to take this name, was born.

The Public Welfare Society, in its meeting of February 9, 1863, had taken a decision whose historic consequences it could hardly have imagined.¹

To learn how this one of many questions discussed was presented to the members of the Society, one has only to turn to the Society's minutes which contained the following passage :

" Under the Chairmanship of Mr. Gustave Moynier at the Casino, Geneva.

Twenty-two members were present, amongst them Messrs. Appia, Bouvier, Bungener, De Lor, Dufour, Dunant, Lavit, Le Cointe, Lutscher, Maunoir, Moynier, Paris, Ramu, Rimond, etc.

¹ *Plate.*

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The Chairman drew the assembly's attention to the idea of creating corps of voluntary nurses for the armies in the field, an idea suggested by Mr. H. Dunant in his recent book entitled: A Memory of Solferino. He would like the Society to consult the "International Welfare Congress" on the possibility of such institutions. This Congress was to meet in Berlin in a few months' time and he would also like this Congress to examine the advisability of a conference of governments for the same object.

General Dufour considered that this would be a great undertaking, the execution of which would be extremely difficult, and he greatly approved the proposal to consult the forthcoming conference which was to follow those of Brussels (1856), Frankfurt (1857) and London (1862), at which our Society was represented.

Mr. Ramu expressed the fear that an organization set up to nurse the wounded would detract from the enthusiasm of populations.

Dr. Maunoir recalled that the official ambulance service had always been insufficient and thought that it could be improved by the addition of voluntary aids.

Mr. Lutscher considered that the support of the Berlin Congress would be useful in helping towards the formation of relief societies.

Dr. Appia, who had had experience of war, did not doubt that voluntary nursing aids would be valuable, not only after great battles, but throughout a campaign.

The Chairman's proposal was put to the vote and adopted unanimously.

The task of carrying it out in so far as possible was entrusted to a committee of five members composed of General Dufour, Mr. Moynier, Mr. Dunant, Dr. Maunoir and Dr. Appia."

A witness who himself played a leading rôle, Gustave Moynier, has recounted the beginnings of the Committee of Five and the spirit in which the first discussions took place, in a small book entitled The First 10 Years of the Red Cross, which he had published in 1873. In it he recalled, with regard to the ICRC's foundation, that a committee had been appointed to study the practical means of carrying out the programme outlined and to find out what part could be played in it.

"The first steps of the Commission along this path, he wrote, were somewhat timid and hesitant. By its grandeur and its very beauty the

task incumbent upon it was truly arduous and, for success to be achieved, it required a great deal of work and perseverance. Despite the innumerable obstacles which it saw before it the Committee was not discouraged and succeeded in drafting a plan which did not seem to it too impossible to carry out. It went even further and announced for October 26 the meeting to which were invited men of all nations who would agree with its views and could help it with their advice."

On the occasion of the centenary of its foundation the International Committee organized a ceremony which took place on February 18, 1963 at 6.15 p.m. in the Aula of Geneva University and which was followed, at 7.30 p.m. by a reception in the Palais de l'Athénée. It was honoured by the presence of representatives of the Swiss Federal and Cantonal Authorities and of the international institutions, of members of the Diplomatic Corps, of personalities of the League and of delegates of National Red Cross Societies. Several descendants of the five founders were to be seen among the many people present. Most of the members of the ICRC were present and the Vice-Presidents of the institution took their place on the rostrum.

Mr. Léopold Boissier, the President, opened the ceremony with a speech which also appears in this number of the Review, after which a basket of flowers was handed to him to convey the congratulations and the best wishes of the staff of the ICRC to the International Committee on the occasion of this great anniversary¹. Mr. Pierre Boissier then described the first years of the Red Cross in a lecture which was a great success¹.

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¹ *Plate.*