The development of the idea of peace in the thinking of Henry Dunant *

by André Durand

"War or peace. Choose. The future is in everyone's hands."

Henry Dunant

Henry Dunant first came up against the problem of war at the battle of Solferino. The impact of the experience remained in his memory for ever and decided the course of his life. Spurred on by a deep repugnance for violence, he then set out on the long road which would lead him to propound ways and means first to protect victims of war, then to restrict the circumstances wherein war could arise, and finally to abolish war altogether. These three approaches—protection, restriction and abolition—complemented each other; they were not alternatives. To Henry Dunant's way of thinking they formed a cohesive system aimed at curbing the excesses of war while at the same time preventing its appearance and eradicating its causes.

I. Protection

When writing his basic treatise Henry Dunant was certainly aware that two courses were open to him: condemn war at its source, or concentrate on protecting the victims. If he chose the second alternative this was out of necessity. He explains this in A Memory of Solferino:

---

* This article has been taken from Actes du Colloque Henry Dunant 1985, edited by the Henry Dunant Society, Geneva. We thank the author and the editor for authorizing us to reproduce it here.
"Since the wishes and hopes of members of the Society of the Friends of Peace must be abandoned, like the dreams of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre and the noble aspirations of such men as the Count de Sellon;

"Since we may repeat the words of a great thinker who said: Men have reached the point of killing without hating each other, and the highest glory, the finest of all the arts, is mutual extermination;

"Since new and terrible methods of destruction are invented daily, with perseverance worthy of a better object, and since the inventors of these instruments of destruction are applauded and encouraged in most of the great European States, which are engaged in an armament race;

"And since, finally, the state of mind in Europe—not to mention yet other indicating factors—seems to point towards the prospect of future wars, the avoidance of which, sooner or later, seems hardly possible;

"In view of all this, why could not advantage be taken of a time of relative calm and quiet to investigate and try to solve a question of such immense and world-wide importance, both from the humane and from the Christian standpoint?"

And Dunant confirmed this point of view in the preamble to the first work he devoted to the history of the Red Cross—La Charité sur les champs de bataille (Charity on the Battlefield):

"I do not claim to discuss here either the law of peace or what has come to be called the law of war.

"I do not touch upon the formidable problem of the legality of war nor, given the present state of things, upon the impossible dream of peace reigning universally.

"My aim is more modest.

"In the name of humanity, reason, Christianity and indeed politics itself I wish, when the dreaded moment comes when men, fellow citizens, Christians—armed one against the other—start spilling soldiers' blood on the ground (the ground which should be sprinkled only by the sweat of labour), I wish charity, in the form of a relief society, to snatch from war all those of its victims whom weapons have wounded but whom the Grim Reaper has not yet scythed down." ¹

In this way, Dunant clearly stated that he was not attacking war itself. But the solemn way in which he expressed himself also showed how much he hated having to refrain from doing so. No

¹ La Charité sur les champs de bataille, Geneva, 1864, p. 6
doubt he felt that the time was not yet ripe to deal successfully with this aspect or that the chances of success were so remote that it was more realistic to tackle first of all the protection of victims. Moreover, these two aspects required different approaches. To have linked his proposals for the benefit of persons placed hors de combat to the question of banning war would certainly have jeopardized their success.

In line with Henry Dunant’s way of thinking, this was also the stance the International Committee for Relief to Wounded Soldiers took at the Geneva Conference of 1863. Its objective was the protection of victims—not the abolition of war. It was only to be expected that the plenipotentiaries meeting in Geneva would be very reluctant to allow civilians (voluntary relief workers) anywhere near the battlefield; and they would have been definitely opposed to the proposal if it had entered their minds that these same relief workers might be messengers of a philosophy of peace. By taking as its objective the care of those people who were hors de combat the Red Cross did not influence the course of the fighting. Only after some years, when it could point to the universal recognition of the work of National Societies, did the Red Cross include in its programme of action the search for ways of participating in the struggle against war.

* *

However, when, many years later, Henry Dunant analysed the reasons why he had written A Memory of Solferino, he gave the chief reason as being the struggle against war. He wrote to Baroness von Suttner:

"It was indeed the horror of war which inspired in me, a mere individual, this burning determination which, thanks to the world-wide help of many people committed to the cause of humanity, led not only to the accomplishment of an enormous international undertaking but also to the instilling in them of a religious horror of war and thereby converting them into friends of peace."  

It was in the same vein that he wrote to Major Hans Daae, an army medical officer: "A Memory of Solferino was written from a

---

1 Proceedings of the International Conference meeting in Geneva on 26, 27, 28 and 29 October 1863. Speech by General Dufour, ICRC Library, No. 3012, p. 5

2 Henry Dunant to Baroness Bertha von Suttner, 24 February 1896, Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO Archives
horror of war and with the intention to impart this horror to all mankind.”

As can be seen from the reactions of many readers, in particular the brothers Jules and Edmond de Goncourt, this aim was achieved: “One finishes this book cursing war”.

We must therefore distinguish two strands in Henry Dunant’s thinking as revealed in A Memory of Solferino. On the one hand there are the concluding proposals—giving rise to the Red Cross—which concern themselves with a specific and clearly restricted field: the protection of victims. On the other hand, the book as a whole, while presenting a faithful portrayal of war, does not take issue with it directly but in a roundabout way.

* 

In a roundabout way: it was Dunant himself who used this expression in a letter to Baroness von Suttner dated 25 March 1896:

“It was the horror of war—this senseless turmoil—which has always inspired me. — I wanted to challenge the law of force at work within our piteous selves, living as we still are in a state of war, our day-to-day lives still regulated by pagan and barbarian laws. I have attacked this law of force in a roundabout way and right in the midst of its brutal fury. — I have tried to show the atrocious consequences of this law of force by describing what I saw at the site of the carnage, so as to instill into nations under orderly governments a horror at this civilized barbarity, in the hope of eradicating national hatreds and prejudices.”

This twofold sense of what Henry Dunant meant in A Memory of Solferino comes through clearly in what he wrote to Rudolf Müller (21 August 1900), when he speaks of himself in the third person as was frequently his wont in writings for publication:

“In 1859, still full of the same ideas he had during the war of Italy when he first thought of “The International Work of the Red Cross”, his aim was twofold: (1) to find a remedy for the evils of war; (2) to convey the horror of war. In point of fact his book A Memory of Solferino fulfils the second aim which was so dear to his heart.

---

1 Henry Dunant to Dr. Hans Daee, 23 May 1900, Anders Daee Archives, Oslo
2 Henry Dunant to Baroness Bertha von Suttner, 25 March 1896, Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO
"He quite rightly thought that, rather than come out openly against war, it was more prudent to let his book speak for itself by showing all the horror involved..."¹

* 

It was therefore at the time of Solferino—even before the battle—that Henry Dunant considered he first felt inclined towards pacifism:

"Many years before the publication of A Memory of Solferino I thought it the duty of all honest men to try and draw together more closely the moral and intellectual bonds amongst kind-hearted people; to unite in one group the best people in every country to work for the common goal of peace throughout the world and harmony among nations. It is the horror of war—that senseless turmoil—which has always inspired me."²

Apropos of this, Dunant recalled an incident which occurred during his brief military career. It was in 1856. The royalist uprising in the canton of Neuchatel had almost caused Prussia to intervene. The Swiss Army was being mobilized. In Geneva Frédéric Amiel composed a patriotic song. Henry Dunant, who was in Palermo at the time, did not share this enthusiasm. As he was suffering from a cold his doctor told him that the climate in Malta would be good for him. He therefore went to Malta and then to Tunis where he spent the winter. When he returned to Switzerland he found life was made difficult for him: "The radical authorities, pleased at an opportunity to harass an aristocrat, albeit in the wrong, did not want to listen to reason."³ He then decided, as he says, to have resort to an excellent stratagem, namely to claim French nationality, to which he was entitled because he was descended, through his maternal grandmother (Colladon—maiden name Gille), from the Huguenots who took refuge in Geneva after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

"From that moment on", wrote Dunant, "as a Frenchman I was exempt from military service and was no longer subjected to the petty

¹ Dunant to Rudolf Müller, 21 August 1900. Bibliothèque Publique et Universitaire de Genève (hereinafter referred to as BPU), Fr. MS 5203. f. 220
² Dunant to Bertha von Suttner, 25 March 1896, Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO
harassment of the Geneva Military Department. The matter was duly approved by the Consul General of France and the Federal Military Authority.”

Was it antimilitarism which led Dunant, at 28 years of age, to seek to escape his military obligations or should his decision be seen as a manifestation of his touchy nature? He goes on to say: “I have always been a model soldier and have nothing to reproach myself with.” He rejected the accusation of lack of patriotism:

“My kind of patriotism is genuine, not the false and narrow short-sighted kind which is not patriotism but the residue of barbarism, condemned both by the Christian way of thinking and by the conscience of modern man.”

Rather must one see in Henry Dunant’s decision the effect of a kind of indifference to nationalities—an indifference which grew stronger throughout his life. He stated that he had always “agreed with the outlook described as cosmopolitan and humanitarian” and commended the remarks by the Prince de Ligne when he boasted in the same cosmopolitan spirit “that he had seven different nationalities”.

If Dunant remembered this incident for such a long time it is because it had memorable consequences. In point of fact Dunant wrote:

“Then, to show that I was not a coward (and obsessed as I was by the memory of Miss Nightingale in the Crimea) I set out for Lombardy in 1859 at my own risk and peril and, there I became, as they said, ‘the first Samaritan’. — You know the rest.”

*  

We too know it. From that point on Dunant was to devote all his energies to having enacted, in law and in practice, the substance of his proposals advocating respect for medical services and protection of the wounded, then, on the same lines, the extension of this respect and protection to the shipwrecked (as early as 1867) and to prisoners of war (likewise from 1867 onwards and in his
lectures in Great Britain in 1872 and 1873). In this way he explored the humanitarian sphere which would later be covered by the first three Geneva Conventions: the wounded and sick during war on land, the wounded, sick and the shipwrecked during naval warfare, and prisoners of war.

II. Limitations

However, proceeding against war in this "roundabout way" did not attack the core of belligerency. It attenuated the effects without yet tackling the causes.

Undoubtedly Dunant had an opportunity, during the war of 1870 and the fighting in the Commune, to observe that merely protecting the victims only partly relieved the miseries of war and that even the application of humanitarian law left something to be desired in certain circumstances. This was the case in the Franco-Prussian war, when the fury of the fighting and the deployment of groups of snipers seriously hindered the application of the Geneva Convention; the same was true during the fighting in the Commune which, to some extent, foreshadowed the methods of urban guerrilla warfare.

The idea of resorting to arbitration came to Dunant in 1870. At the time when the Association internationale de Prévoyance (International Provident Association) was founded there appeared —among other projects with assistance and social well-being in mind—a scheme to set up a jury of arbitration. In an article in the Moniteur universel (16 April 1871), Firmin Mirbeau recalled the role Dunant played in its foundation and made this incisive comment:

"The most important improvement being studied by the Association is the constitution of a grand international jury which could be called on to judge all disputes grave enough to cause a war of extermination."

The idea of international arbitration continued from then on to form part of Henry Dunant's ideas. It was one of the elements of the programme of the Universal Alliance of Order and Civilization, founded in Paris in June 1871 and in London in 1873.

The programme of the Universal Alliance did not aim to overthrow the social or political order but sought to improve it by furthering progress, well-being and social justice, thereby eliminating the causes of disorders, revolutions and wars. In particular, the Alliance proposed:

22
"To encourage, by all legitimate means, the steady progress of civilization by trying to preserve political and social peace (in short, proper harmony amongst nations and individuals) while remaining aloof from personal strife—for example by remaining aloof from political struggles between parties and governments."

By appealing to sentiments of justice and benevolence the Alliance proposed a form of patriarchal rather than paternalistic society founded on the co-operation of the “best people”. These idealistic views—though evincing a high moral stance—probably did not take sufficient cognizance of the economic situation during the second half of the nineteenth century or of escalating social demands and political confrontations which were to dominate the world scene. Nevertheless they provided Dunant with a framework for his thinking as regards arbitration, the fight against slavery and the protection of prisoners of war.

* 

It was during a lecture given in Plymouth on 13 September 1872 that Dunant propounded his concept of arbitration. At that period he was continuing simultaneous inquiries into the protection of prisoners of war and into arbitration. He then contacted Henry Richard, president of the Peace Society and pioneer of arbitration amongst nations, and was appointed Secretary of the Society. Henry Richard encouraged Dunant to reply to the question publicly posed by the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences: “Is it possible to establish an International Court of Arbitration in order to avoid wars and, if so, how?” Dunant’s reply was naturally in the affirmative. He pointed out the initiatives previously taken to this effect by Lord Clarendon and Napoleon III. Moreover, a current event provided him with a wonderful example, because at that very moment a dispute between the United States and Great Britain over the ship Alabama was being put to arbitration in the very room in the City Hall where, eight years previously, the Geneva Convention had been concluded. ¹

In his presentation Dunant proposed setting up a “High Court of International Arbitration” “made up of the diplomatic services of civilized States”. He noted that arbitration was one of those ideas which although “looked upon by many as generous but utopian might

¹ Arbitral award was rendered on 14 September 1872. To commemorate the event, the Genevan authorities had a salute fired from the top of the Treille Promenade.
soon become, so to speak, a permanent and regular feature of diplomacy, because today’s Utopia often becomes tomorrow’s reality.” He proposed starting a movement which would lead to the conclusion of a diplomatic treaty by availing itself of the same means which had been used to create the Geneva Convention, “the originator of which,” he said, “who is now addressing you, has always been a zealous champion of world peace”.

For the most part Dunant himself drafted the bulletins for the Universal Alliance. In the bulletin of the English branch of the Alliance, The Universal Alliance, he published an article entitled The Peace of Europe which he later quoted in a letter to Dr. Hans Daae as an example of his formal commitment on behalf of peace: ¹

“Ideas of tolerance, of concurrence in good works, of the coming ‘reign of law’ between nations, as between individuals, as a means to the attainment of lasting peace, can only form the strongest and most enduring of ties. The extension of these ideas and of the social affections from which they spring is the very end for which society exists.

“It is certain, however, that international conflicts will occur; and the practical question is how to regulate them in the interest of humanity. That such benevolent aspirations are prevalent in all civilized nations is a fact; but, in order that they may constitute a distinct and permanent gain to society, they must give birth to laws constituting an internal bond between nations, superior to all the accidents of war and the estrangements caused by the collision of present interest.”

* 

Thus Henry Dunant was well aware that, in the world as it existed, wars seemed inevitable and would be more and more deadly. His vision of war seemed to expand. Up until then, he had seen mainly its material consequences: the wounded, the dead, destruction and physical suffering. From then on he became sensible of the destructive effect it exerted on the soul. He feared he could not rely on the moral values to which he appealed in his

¹ “I am enclosing a publication in English dated June 1874 which I drew up and for which I wrote the articles. I was the one who created this little journal in London to promote the spread of humanitarian works by the Universal Alliance founded by me but which no longer exists either in London or in Paris.” Henry Dunant to Dr. Hans Daae, 30 April 1899, Anders Daae Archives, Oslo.
Universal Alliance manifests: the virtues of order, benevolence and solidarity amongst nations. When, in 1888-1889, he undertook the editing of the main copy for l’Avenir sanglant, an eloquent pamphlet against war, militarism and poverty, he became the accuser:

“When one studies the long succession of centuries—all of them filled with perpetual wars—to judge the past according to the Word of God is to make against history an unanswerable accusation of crimes against the human race.

“War, the science of disorder which proceeds from the anarchy in high places, kills not only the body but also too often the soul. It humiliates, corrupts, withers, demeans. Cloaked in the most deceptive appearances, it is the source of a thousand degrading, cruel and bestial things. Its savagery devours and becomes wild hatred: its brilliance turns to darkness. It obfuscates intelligence, twists and distorts the mind. It fetters the souls it does not destroy. Its demands preclude liberty, fraternity and family life, friends, neighbours, even one’s conscience. Whose sons are these men, who are incapable of producing life and yet so adept in wiping it out, whose talents are geared towards murder and destruction and whose glory derives therefrom?”

At the same time he tried to tackle more closely the fundamental aspects of belligerency by fighting against the harmful manifestations of traditionalism and against the illusions they engendered, which he himself, it would appear, had difficulty in divesting himself of:

“People are afraid of truth and they do not like to proclaim it too loudly as it would harm their interests and their position in the world; they fear to attract attention because the yoke of accepted ideas is so heavy that we do not dare to cast it off; these ideas weigh so heavily upon us that they even come to take the place of our conscience. Is not our entire life most often a continual effort to escape from ourselves and from the truth? If we accepted the truth there would be too many things to revise, correct and change in our ideas, in our opinions, in our judgements and in the wisdom we think we possess; it would almost involve having to begin learning all over again.

“We therefore owe a debt of gratitude to those who are not afraid to speak the truth, who fight against worldwide militarism, against

---

war and its principal cause: 'political chauvinism which fosters hatred among peoples' (Schroeder). Indeed yes, if chauvinism were to disappear mankind would be happier.'

Thus in 1899, during the Conference of The Hague, Dunant was ready to resume his offensive against war and make his opinions known on the problem of arbitration and the treatment of prisoners of war. At that time he could count upon an effective ally: Baroness Bertha von Suttner, whom he would make his messenger to the delegates at the Conference. However let us here take up the third phase of the struggle against war: the struggle for its abolition.

III. Abolition

It was in September 1895 that the meeting—by correspondence—took place between Henry Dunant and Baroness von Suttner. Hungarian by birth and Austrian by marriage, Bertha von Suttner, née Countess Kinsky, seems to have been a woman of a wide culture and of noble character, unreservedly devoted to the cause of pacifism. She founded the Austrian Society of Friends of Peace and was one of the outstanding figures in the pacifist movement at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

Baumberger's article on Henry Dunant, which appeared in Über Land und Meer in August 1895, had brought the founder of the Red Cross back into the public eye. Certainly, Dunant had not been completely forgotten. He could still count on faithful friends with whom he kept up a steady correspondence. But Baumberger's article had a two-fold effect: while revealing to the general public Henry Dunant's role in founding the Red Cross he paid a glowing tribute to him in a way that could not but move him and restore his self-confidence.

---


This text appeared in German in the review Die Waffen nieder, Vth year, 1897, No. 8/9, p. 310. (See page 30, Note 3.) The second paragraph of the passage quoted above is worded somewhat differently:

"We therefore owe a debt of gratitude to those who are not afraid to speak the truth, who fight against worldwide militarism, against war and its principal cause: chauvinism. Chauvinism fosters hatred among peoples, nations and races. This destructive chauvinism must not be confused with healthy patriotism. Patriotism is love and true devotion; but chauvinism is hate—hateful fanaticism." (Translated from the German text.)

2 Österreichische Gesellschaft der Friedensfreunde, 1891
In June 1892, the Winterthur branch of the Red Cross, which maintained excellent friendly relations with Henry Dunant, gave him for the anniversary of the battle of Solferino, a book by Baroness von Suttner book entitled "Die Waffen nieder!" (Down with arms!).

In this publication, a novel with a message wherein the author describes the development of her feeling towards unconditional pacifism, the work and character of Henry Dunant are warmly evoked:

"The Red Cross! I knew the feelings of immense and sorrowful compassion that underlie this institution. I had taken a keen interest in the meetings held in Geneva; I had read Dunant's writings which brought it into being and which are one sustained cry of anguish and compassion.

"This noble citizen of Geneva, after having courageously worked to exhaustion on the battlefield of Solferino, told the world what he had seen: a colossal number of wounded abandoned for five or six days, with no aid at all. He wanted to aid all of them, but what could he do in the face of such immense distress? He saw poor wretches whose lives would have been saved by a drop of water and a piece of bread; he saw men who were still breathing being hastily buried! He also denounced the scarcity of resources available to the ambulance services."

Dunant could not but be touched by this tribute. He wrote to his brother Pierre:

"... [a few] days ago for the anniversary of Solferino the Committee sent me, with a charming letter, a book by Baroness Bertha von Suttner (Dresden and Leipzig, 1892), beautifully bound in two volumes: it is a novel about war, or rather against war, entitled Die Waffen nieder! (Down with arms!) and has created quite a stir. It is the story of a family which begins in Solferino and covers three wars in Denmark, Austria and France. Its heroine speaks of my book A Memory of Solferino and very flatteringly of me as the founder of the Convention."  

Dunant does not seem to have established contact with Bertha von Suttner immediately. In September 1895 he wrote to her enclosing various press cuttings, including an article from Das Rote

1 Bertha von Suttner, Die Waffen nieder! Dresden, Leipzig and Vienna, 1889
2 Henry Dunant to Pierre Dunant, 22 July 1892. BPU, Fr. MS 2115 C, f. 117 (letter incomplete)
Kreuz (the official publication of the Swiss Red Cross) and very probably Baumberger’s article. Bertha von Suttner replied at once, first on 28 September acknowledging receipt of his letter and promising to write in greater detail; then on 7 October in an enthusiastic letter full of respect and admiration for Henry Dunant.

On the one hand, she had discovered that he was still alive:

“Once I learned that you were still of this world (because indeed I too thought you were dead) and once, having read the newspapers which you kindly sent me, I came to know of the entire extent of your work—which showed me the full extent of the ingratitude of nations—I felt a burning desire within myself to spare my contemporaries the shame of forgetting about you in a similar way.”

On the other hand she discovered Dunant’s pacifism and immediately enrolled him in the peace movement:

“What filled me with immense joy was to learn from your letter and the article in Rothe Kreuz published in Bern that you are one of us. That is to say a peace-loving person, an enemy of war and militarism. You have placed your glowing charity at the service of mankind to alleviate and prevent the evils caused by war; you would be a thousand times more happy if mankind were spared for ever from these evils. But it was the only way in which to begin—your movement was the precursor of ours. Mgr Freppel has realized this.”

And if she felt so much joy in learning that the founder of the Red Cross was a peace-loving person, it was because she was not convinced that the Red Cross Societies shared his convictions:

“But the various Red Cross Societies that show themselves opposed to the peace movement do not realize this.—And this is explained by the participation of military personnel in this institution whose raison d’être is war.”

*

Here appears what might be called the paradox of the Red Cross.

If it is regarded simply as an institution for improving the efficiency of medical services and protecting the wounded without discrimination, then one can say that it comes within the general framework of war; it is trying to mitigate its effects without expressly aiming to abolish it. Medical services are an integral part of armies. Although they refrain from taking part in the fighting,
they are nevertheless one of the elements in their country's defence. In the early years of the institution, certain medical officers refused to be referred to as "neutral" out of feelings of patriotism.

But if the work of the Red Cross is viewed from the dynamic aspect and not merely as a formal structure; if it is seen as the first legal application of a movement of ideas which sets the protection of and respect for human beings in the forefront of its concerns; if it is considered that, by proclaiming the concept of universal solidarity among men, the Red Cross was questioning the notion of the inevitability of war; finally, if reference is made to Dunant's own analysis of the motives which inspired him, then it may be said that the Red Cross has opened the route towards a law of peace and that its vocation comprises taking part, within its own sphere, in the struggle to abolish armed conflicts.

*

Henry Dunant was quite clearly overwhelmed by Bertha von Suttner's reaction. In his reply he declared himself willing to take part in the peace movement, bringing to it the benefit of his talents and prestige. He agreed with the Boroness's interpretation of his feelings: "It was indeed the horror of war which inspired the work of which I came to be the founder." But, at the same time, he continued to be guided by a dramatic vision of history which recurs like a leitmotiv, in his writings. As a consequence, he was unwilling to compromise on the role of the Red Cross, which he included as one of the elements in the programme he suggested to his correspondent:

"If peace is to reign one day, we must do everything in our power henceforth to prepare for this reign. And we must do it even though, sad to say, we may be convinced that Europe and the world may have to undergo a general war. Let us therefore prepare people's minds and hearts for practical action and let us never cease to show our commitment:

1. To arbitration among nations, among various associations and among individuals.

2. To the international work of the Red Cross, in all its branches (first-aid workers and so on).

3. To an International Women's Alliance for Good Works under the patronage of the Sovereigns and the princesses of the Royal Families to enhance (gradually) needless to say, the social position of
woman throughout the world, to protect them, to defend them, etc., wherever necessary."  

Bertha von Suttner, for her part, was unwilling to take part personally in so many different projects. While assuring Dunant of her "unfailing admiration", she warned him that she could not become actively involved:

"The work for which I am responsible—I might almost say, by which I am crushed—in the peace movement means that I am duty-bound not to deviate from it and not to undertake any other large projects."  

Thus Dunant, whose genius sometimes tended to dissipate its efforts, found himself led back to a definitive goal: promoting pacifism.

*

Henry Dunant certainly benefitted from meeting Bertha von Suttner. In her he found a confidante and a friend. He had the chance to describe his life and ordeals in autobiographical letters, in which he also recalled the various stages in the development of his pacifist ideas.

Instead of confiding the trend of his thoughts and his indignation to his notebooks he was able to publish them in the journal of the Friends of Peace, *Die Waffen nieder!* or in other journals in sympathy with their ideas.

Among his new friends he found like minds and encouragement. His thought took shape. The aim remained the abolition of
war; the means: a publicity campaign which would result in an irresistible movement of public opinion so strong as to bring pressure to bear even on governments and lead to the conclusion of diplomatic agreements that would give tangible form to this popular movement.¹

* *

It was with this in mind that Dunant submitted a grand plan to Bertha von Suttner: the creation of an international peace movement, a League for Peace, brought about by a Universal Women's Alliance which, extending to all continents and all cultures, might total 10 or 20 million members and could undoubtedly influence governments:

"Only women, once convinced, have enough energy to obtain a really substantial result. Well-disposed men are deterred at a certain stage of zeal or even conviction by the fear of being taxed with lack of patriotism. That will not prevent them from encouraging the women's movement but many of them are afraid of being called international, stateless, etc.—in a word, of compromising themselves." ²

Nevertheless, to attract the masses, Dunant still counted on the help of the aristocracy:

"In order to succeed, such a movement must have the aristocracy at its head and in every respect it must be organized on a completely aristocratic basis."

Undoubtedly Dunant was thinking back to the publicity campaign he conducted in 1863, when he toured the courts of Europe to obtain the support of princes and kings. But what was effective when it concerned obtaining protection and neutral status for the wounded might be less so when it came to enrolling these crowned heads in the struggle for peace. Baroness von Suttner, herself a member of the Austro-Hungarian nobility, the daughter of a field-marshall and chamberlain of the Dual Monarchy, did not share what she called his "illusions":

¹ On his 68th birthday the International Peace Bureau sent Henry Dunant the following message: "The philanthropic international Red Cross Institution, due to your initiative, is the precursor of the era of peace which must one day regenerate the world by guaranteeing the well-being of peoples. In the name of the International Peace Bureau, Elie Ducommun, Honorary Secretary." 7 May 1896, UNO Archives.

² Henry Dunant to Bertha von Suttner, 6 July 1896, Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO
"Unfortunately, in the peace movement, the aristocrats are still our opponents; it is in the ranks of my cousins, male and female, where I find the greatest resistance to this propaganda—generals, courtiers, chamberlains and officers' wives believe that any talk of changing old customs has to do with nihilism and anarchism. For them, people who want to reform the present state of society (a state which has brought them so many advantages) are either criminals or else mad." ¹

When notifying Dunant of the publication of the first of her articles "Ein kleines Arsenal gegen den Militarismus" in Die Waffen nieder!, Bertha von Suttner made another request to him:

"And now something else: Mr. Idelson had the idea of taking the peace movement to the East. He will speak to you about his plan; I can add that the idea of conducting this crusade, together with you, fills me with enthusiasm and I shall try to win the support also of General Turr, who has many contacts in the countries of the East and is, as perhaps you know, a fervent pacifist." (28 May 1897, BPU Fr. MS 2122, p. 133)

Dunant needed no further encouragement. The Near East had always held an interest for him and sparked off his imagination. To this he added the Far East, with which he was less familiar but where the Red Cross had by that time been well established, particularly in Siam and Japan:

"Japan alone is enough to justify our interest.

"The minutes of the Red Cross Society read by the President in the presence of the Empress of Japan revealed that there were more than three hundred thousand members of the Japanese Red Cross the previous year." (31 July 1897, Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO.)

He then drew up the "Adresse aux Nations de l'Extrême-Orient", which he sent to Dr. Idelson on 14 July to be forwarded to Bertha von Suttner.

"Europeans who are engaged in the struggle against war appeal, through this document, to Asians of all races, nations, religions and opinions to request them to work with them in a brotherly spirit to promote peace throughout the world.

"Our civilization, termed European, came to us from the East. You have been several centuries ahead of us. Over and above

¹ Bertha von Suttner to Henry Dunant, 18 July 1896, BPU, Fr. MS 2112, p. 122
everything else we must clearly recognize and admit with deep sadness that for many centuries our ancestors, our European ancestors, have all too often behaved in a barbaric manner towards your ancestors, the people of the Far East.

"We appeal to all you peoples of the East and Far East and plead with you to set up among yourselves peace associations like ours and with which we can correspond, in order to disseminate these ideas in your countries, joining us in acting with a single purpose for the good of mankind."

The address was read on 22 August 1897 at the Peace Congress in Hamburg for which Henry Dunant had special off-prints made and distributed several copies.

On 6 August Henry Dunant sent Bertha von Suttner his request for admission to the Society of the Friends of Peace.

* 

The Imperial Proclamation of 12 August 1898 wherein the Czar, Nicholas II, proposed convening a diplomatic conference which would search for "the most effective means of ensuring that all nations reaped the benefits of a real and lasting peace and, above all, ways of putting an end to the continual development of present-day weapons" aroused great hopes among the public, in spite of the reservations voiced in diplomatic circles. It suddenly seemed that the end of the century would mark the end, or at least the decline, of barbaric customs and herald an era of reason in the century to come. In pacifist circles, enthusiasm was unbounded. Bertha von Suttner immediately wrote to Henry Dunant:

"Well, my dear good friend, what have you to say about this wonderful news—the Czar's missive?

"I have been waiting a long time for news from you, I have also waited in vain for more gems from your storehouse of knowledge.—Are you ill?

"I am enormously busy, for as a result of Nicholas II's peace manifesto, letters, dispatches and requests for articles are flowing in. (...). (7 September 1898, BPU, Fr. MS 2,112 p. 140.)

Baroness de Saint-René, from the Women's League for General Disarmament, declared:

"I hope that before long the Peace Leagues will have no more reason to exist.""

1 Baroness de Saint-René to Henry Dunant, 30 August 1898, BPU, Fr. MS 2111, p. 303
Dunant, too, was enthusiastic. But he had seen too much misery and heard too many solemn promises to believe that a diplomatic conference could at the stroke of a pen abolish national rivalries and bridle the ambitions of the leaders of nations. At bottom he had a tragic view of history: he expressed it in those astonishing religious diagrams by which, on the basis of biblical prophesies and the Revelations of St. John, he illustrates the future of humanity and the tribulations that will confront it until the last syllable of recorded time.

The themes in *L'Avenir sanglant*—a very detailed work which Dunant intended to publish (and large extracts of which, as we have seen, were published thanks to Baroness von Suttner's help)—constitute a picture of political and social spheres which is no less dramatic. As its title indicates, the future as glimpsed by Dunant is not one of peaceful resolutions:

"There will be destruction to avoid being destroyed; and once the dogs of war have been unleashed it cannot be otherwise. The combatants in the duel resumed time and again for centuries are ready for more battles, for a struggle to the bitter end, determined to drag the rest of Europe (and perhaps indeed the entire world) in with them. And this at a time when monarchies, churches and all institutions revered by men for their antiquity are threatening to fall into ruin, and after them many people see nothing but bottomless darkness. This conflict will involve most of the civilized nations, whether they wish it or not; discarding their brilliant but misleading civilization, they will relapse into barbarity—scientific barbarity! And amid this gigantic mêlée of races, all will suffer to some extent the appalling consequences." ¹

He was not therefore ready to share the view that "Peace Leagues would have no more reason to exist"; still less the Red Cross Societies. Hence in his reply to Bertha von Suttner he continues to be realistic:

"You, Madam, are the one who must be thanked above all. An enormous step has been taken, whatever may happen. The world will no longer cry 'Utopia!'—contempt for our ideas is henceforth forbidden. And if it does not become a reality immediately after the Congress, which will certainly take place, it is nevertheless on the right road. This initiative will always remain as a precedent." ²

¹ *L'Avenir sanglant*, BPU, Fr. MS 4557, p. 11. Quoted by D.C. Mercanton, op. cit., p. 192.

² Henry Dunant to Bertha von Suttner, 21 September 1898, Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO
Nevertheless, this realism, this clear-headedness, acted on Dunant as a spur rather than as a brake. As at Solferino, he was undismayed by the immensity of the task, using the medium which suited him best—writing—he immediately joined in the struggle being conducted by the Friends of Peace. Under the title "The proposal by His Majesty, The Emperor Nicholas II", he published a remarkable commentary, clearly and vigorously expounding his own views as to how to strengthen the spirit of peace and to set up a system of arbitration among nations.1

"It would be a tremendous achievement if one could simply manage, by common agreement and to an extent which is reasonable, prudent and sensible, to slow down this frightful struggle wherein each one is trying to outdistance the others and if one could put an end to the constant increase in armaments or reduce them gradually, avoiding any offence to the pride of governments and proceeding by stages. Here, as in all great actions, there are numerous practical difficulties to be solved and numerous obstacles to be overcome. The great cause for joy is the reversal of opinion in favour of pacifism which is beginning to take effect in people's minds, thanks to the intervention by the Emperor: States will no longer be merely concerned with thwarting each other and making ceaseless preparations to destroy one another at a time when society is tottering on its foundations. That alone makes it worthwhile to ponder calmly the Russian proposal." (p. 5)

After having paid tribute to Frédéric Passy, "a veteran in the cause of peace", and to Baroness von Suttner, "a tireless advocate and staunch supporter of peace", Dunant emphasized the role of the Societies for Peace and that of Arbitration and Disarmament:

"It is numbers, in the end, which form public opinion, particularly in Western Europe where the electorate, i.e., the people, influence governments. Each of us, and all without exception, men and women of every nation, must work towards appeasement and harmony; this alone can improve conditions for multitudes of human beings in a lasting and serious manner. It is both a duty and a privilege." (p. 6)

Then, to pour scorn on those who, either through blindness or imbecility, refused to imagine the calamities threatening humanity, Dunant had recourse to the style of the ancient prophets:

"Let them not then bewail their fate, those upon whom will fall the frightful calamities of future wars—those who will have scorned even

---

1 Published in German also in the Deutsche Revue, January 1889
to take the trouble to study the question of peace; those who will have treated it lightheartedly, with bias and with irony. Woe unto them! Because, should they be spared by war, anarchy with all its horrors, anarchy—the inevitable consequence of worldwide conflagration—will not spare them. They will be like dust driven before the tempest. Evil will spread from nation to nation. Do not mock now because the time of destruction is at hand; the blood of nations will flow as water upon the face of the earth.” (p. 7)

Dunant then appealed to the public at large, as being the only force capable of winning the consent of governments:

“Rouse yourselves therefore from your lethargy, your culpable indifference, your futile petty squabbles often completely pointless. Open your eyes which you have closed to danger; there are fateful moments in history: do not let pass the auspicious time—the year of goodwill; let not the end of the century slip away without a great popular peace movement springing up everywhere in favour of peace and the reduction of armaments, and may the number of its partisans be counted in millions. When you are in the majority, yours is the opinion which forms that of your governments, your parliaments, your ministries. Everywhere, therefore there must be majorities clearly determined on peace; so on this issue your apathy is cowardice; your indifference, insanity; your opposition, laziness and ignorance—worse still, it is a crime. Wake up before it is too late.” (pp. 7 and 8)

Then expanding on the substance of the Emperor’s proclamation, and drawing inspiration from the proposals he himself had put forward at the Plymouth Congress in September 1872, Dunant considered what kind of shape to confer on institutions designed to avoid, or at least put limits on, conflicts:

— A permanent congress, or international assembly, holding regular meetings, “a genuine international power for good, inspired by the highest sentiment that of peace (...).” (p. 8, summarized version.)
— This Permanent Congress would come to adopt international legal principles capable of safeguarding lasting peace. (p. 9, id.)
— Each nation could set up a consultative committee, composed of eminent national figures, responsible for helping diplomats in their work and defending national interests. (p. 10, id.)
— It would be within the competence of the Congress, convened by sessions of the Permanent Bureau, to smooth out diffi-
culties whenever a quarrel between two nations was referred to it. (p. 11, *id.*)

— The Congress would also be a Disarmament and Arbitration Bureau or an International Mediation Bureau. (p. 13, *id.*)

— Later, in the course of successive sessions, the Permanent Congress could contemplate setting up new bodies similar to the international offices (Universal Postal Union, International Telegraphic Administration, International Bureau of Weights and Measures, etc.) as well as major undertakings of general utility. (p. 13 *id.*)

Recalling the scepticism and disbelief which greeted the foundation of the Red Cross, Dunant showed the role he played in bringing men and nations together:

"The Red Cross Societies were the first milestone in the brotherly reconciliation of nations on the practical basis of charity at its highest and most noble: among men of all countries they created bonds of sympathy and good will; they helped to destroy many international prejudices by giving thinking people a broader and more balanced understanding of men and countries. In time of peace they will always bring the balm of kindness to heal the most grievous wounds of Humanity." (p. 12)

Dunant finally called on all people of good will to support the Czar's initiative:

"War or peace. Choose. The future is in everyone's hands. Are you for peace? If the answer is yes, then you, men of all races, should hasten to become active members of the numerous peace societies, so as to bear witness to your love of peace; or, if no such society exists where you are, found one." (p. 17)

*  

Dunant did not go to The Hague. But from his place of retirement in Heiden, he followed closely the progress of the Conference. He advised Baroness von Suttner and indicated whom she should meet. He seemed to be burning with desire to be there and to stir people up again as he had done so successfully in 1863.

For her part, Bertha von Suttner had numerous discussions with delegates to the Conference many of whom she knew. She was disturbed that the Conference agenda included under item 5, the adaptation of the Geneva Convention to naval warfare.
In her opinion, this was wasted effort, since the time spent on “Codifying violence” would allow the main problems, disarmament and arbitration, to be “dodged”.

Eight days before the Conference began, this great pacifist had told Henry Dunant her opinion on the subject and asked him for his support:

“

My dear Sir, my friend,

Your splendid work, which has done so much good, is now—in the hands of reactionaries—being turned into an obstacle in the path of a greater good.

You know what I mean: all the military men, statesmen and governments, who do not want to hear a word about the end of wars, entrench themselves behind the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention to obstruct the entire Conference of The Hague. They are going to discuss additional articles to deal with the evils of future massacres, so as not to have to concern themselves with the means of avoiding such massacres.

Well, this is what must be opposed. These gentlemen must learn that the nations expect more and that the founder of the Red Cross himself, who keeps abreast of the times, expects more. You have always wanted the Red Cross to be a step towards the white flag of peace. Between 1859 and 1899 the world has not stood still.

So to fend off this danger—this snare which has been laid for pacifists—what we would need is for you to protest. I know how you think on this. If you were to write me a letter in this vein and permit me to publish it, perhaps we could frustrate the militarists’ plans and ensure that the outcome of the Conference is in line with what you demonstrated so well in your article for the Deutsche Revue.

Please write to me at the Central Hotel in The Hague, where I arrive on the sixteenth of this month.”

Dunant replied immediately (12 May 1899) to Bertha von Suttner. After having paid tribute to the “noble and humane feminine influence” and to his correspondent’s “great experience”, he continues:

“As the instigator of the International Work of the Red Cross and the Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field, known as the Geneva Convention, I openly

---

1 See Bertha von Suttner, Der Kampf und die Vermeidung des Weltkriegs (1892-1900 und 1907-1914), Herausgegeben von Dr. Alfred H. Fried, I. Band, Zurich 1917, Orell Füssli, p. 525.

2 Bertha von Suttner to Henry Dunant, 9 May 1899, BPU, Fr. MS 2112, p. 145
confess that it is aversion to war and the horrors of war which has always guided me.—Also, subject number 8 in the programme of the Circular sent on 30 December 1898/11 January 1899 by His Excellency, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, to the representatives of the Powers at St. Petersburg, has all my support.

"This item accepts the principle of mediation and arbitration, with the aim of preventing armed conflicts among nations. My pamphlet proves to you how much I would like to see an official, diplomatic, international study into ways of promoting peace; I would also like to see the Hague Congress set up a Permanent Mediation Bureau recognized by all the States in the world—with annual sessions—and to which they would be obliged always to have recourse in order to smooth out complications that might arise in the future.

"This Permanent Bureau, once set up by a congress such as the Congress of The Hague, would promptly become an established institution, the competence of which no one would call into doubt. This would make it much easier to maintain a lasting agreement and keep peace in the world without sacrificing the interest of any of the States while at the same time safeguarding their pride and their national honour. This can be done only by a powerful diplomatic assembly such as the one in The Hague and would be a great step along the path towards true civilization.

"The fact that an International Special Committee is a permanent body appointed by the Congress of The Hague (Subject No. 8 on the official programme presented by Russia) would effectively contribute to perpetuating the peaceful wishes of Sovereigns and peoples and—what is more—'would powerfully combine'—as has been so well expressed in the Emperor's proclamation—'the efforts of all States sincerely endeavouring to make the great concept of universal peace triumph over disruptive and discordant elements.'

I have the honour to be,
Your Ladyship's obedient servant,
H. Dunant
Instigator of the International Work of the Red Cross and the 'Geneva Convention'.

Heiden, 12 May 1899

---

1 Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO
Bertha von Suttner then published Dunant’s reply in the Daily Bulletin distributed to the delegates at the Conference, using a quotation from Frédéric Passy as an epigraph: “One does not humanize slaughter—one condemns it because one is in the process of becoming more humane”. In a brief introduction she stated that Dunant had replied to the question she asked him: “Whether he thought the Peace Conference should concern itself mainly with extending the Geneva Convention or rather if he too thought the Red Cross should give way to the white flag.”

Dunant was certainly very satisfied at having been able, in this way, to make his voice heard in the Conference and place before the delegates his plan for a Permanent Mediation Bureau. It is noticeable, however, that he did not reply exactly to the question that Bertha von Suttner had asked. The Red Cross was his life, the crown of all his work. Peace was his objective. He did not understand how anyone could regard them as conflicting, or even dissociated. On the contrary, he considered that they supported each other. So when he declared that Item No. 8 of the Conference ‘had all his support’, he was not making a value judgement on the other subjects on its agenda. As he wrote to Bertha von Suttner on 18 May:

“It is pointless to blind ourselves to facts. No official diplomatic programme can be changed or modified because any external attempt, any approach by outsiders, would be loftily rejected by such a Conference. There is nothing one can do about it. I feel our entire tactics must be for us to ‘cling to’ Item 8 in order to obtain, if possible, a special ‘resolution’, a protocol separate from the rest, establishing a ‘Permanent Diplomatic Commission for Mediation’, a resolution of the Congress of The Hague which would stand apart, independent of the first seven items of Count Muravieff’s Programme.

“It would be dangerous to tamper with the first seven items on the programme and even to talk about them.”

1 Item 8 of the Conference agenda was drafted as follows: “Acceptance in principle of the use of offers of services, mediation and optional arbitration for suitable cases, with the aim of preventing conflicts among nations; agreement on how they are to be applied and the establishment of uniform practice in their employment”.

2 Henry Dunant to Baroness von Suttner, 18 May 1899, Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO
In addition Dunant proposed designating The Hague as the headquarters of the Mediation Committee “in tribute to Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands”.

*

In point of fact Henry Dunant never strayed very far from Baroness von Suttner’s point of view, though probably for other reasons. He had had experience of the 1863 Geneva Congress and the 1864 Diplomatic Conference, where the programme had been limited strictly to a single subject. When the draft convention on prisoners of war, presented in 1872 by the Universal Alliance of Order and Civilization, appeared on the more extensive programme proposed by the Czar, Alexander II, at the Brussels Conference in 1874, Dunant had had a feeling that a distinction would be made later on between the Law of Geneva and the Law of The Hague:

“The Alliance wanted to diminish the horrors of war by proposing a draft diplomatic convention for prisoners of war.

“As for the Russian Government, it wants to regulate war, which is something quite different.

“The Alliance studied and sought to find a single wide-ranging issue concerning humanity.

“Russia wants to regulate the laws and customs of war...

“There is obviously a great difference between the two attitudes, the two plans and the two methods of approach.” ¹

In addition, in his commentary on the proposals by Czar Nicholas II, Dunant had advocated an approach which, by limiting the conference programme to a single objective, would have improved its chances of success:

“All the States in the world can reach diplomatic agreement on a clearly defined issue. Thus each year a new question could be dealt with, discussed and resolved and lead to a diplomatic convention on that specific point. In Brussels the Conference wished to include too many things at once; and that is exactly what prevents the conclusion of a regular diplomatic treaty approved by Governments.” (p. 15)

*

¹ *La Croix-Rouge*, the Belgian Bulletin of the Universal Alliance, *Revue de la Charité internationale sur les champs de bataille et en temps de paix*, tenth year, September 1874
As regards the subject which appeared vital in the pacifists' view—arms reduction—the States representatives to the Hague Conference contented themselves with recommendations. Those who drew up the conference documents believed that the various nations' criteria governing military manpower and spending were so disparate that co-ordinated agreement in this respect could not be hoped for.

Despite this reservation, the Conference had profoundly changed the nature of relationships between nations: it had instituted the recourse to good offices and mediation; it had provided for the establishment of international commissions of inquiry; and it had set up a Permanent Court of Arbitration. In the eyes of the partisans of peace this represented considerable progress. It could hardly be expected that arbitration would immediately become binding just after such a concept had been introduced or that there would not be some reservations in its field of application.

The Conference had also introduced important innovations in codifying the laws and customs of war and in adapting the Geneva Convention of 22 August 1864 to naval warfare. Henry Dunant was able to note with satisfaction that two of the subjects which had preoccupied him from the first—the protection of victims of naval warfare, which the Empress Eugénie had asked him to promote in 1867, and the protection of prisoners of war, on which he had lectured in London in 1872 and Brighton in 1873—had actually been embodied in law.

* *

Scarcely had the Congress of The Hague finished its work when war broke out in South Africa. This was surely the moment to put into effect the provisions of the Hague Conventions on arbitration and mediation. But it rarely happens that a diplomatic treaty can be strictly applied to every situation. Great Britain considered that the Boer War was not a war between States, and that therefore the concept of arbitration did not appear applicable. Nevertheless, Dunant took part in the endeavours of various institutions and committees seeking to end the war by mediation, either through the press ¹ or by associating himself with the demonstrations of pacifist organizations. For him it was an opportunity for the public practical implementation of his views on arbitration and mediation. On

¹ See the article published in Allgemeen Handelsblatt, Amsterdam, 22 June 1900. D.C. Mercanton, Henry Dunant, Essai bio-bibliographique. No. 50.
17 March 1900 he sent Major Hans Daae a very detailed report on what various countries in Europe had been doing and the petitions they had made in favour of mediation and pointed out his part in it:

"The partisans of peace have not remained idle since war started in South Africa.

"The Dutch have made direct approaches (to which I was asked to be party and to which I eagerly agreed) to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, to try and speed up a peace agreement, or at least a cease-fire to open the way to arbitration. In addition, a similar approach has been made by the Austrian Society of the Friends of Peace in Vienna (in which the Baroness B. von Suttner requested me to join) to the Queen and the British Government.

"Approaches have also been made by the Netherlands General Peace League, by the Netherlands Women's League for International Disarmament, also by the World League for Peace and Free International Trade, the headquarters of which is in The Hague and which has done me the honour of appointing me Honorary President. (...)".¹

Henry Dunant was not one of those who are fully committed to the civilizing influence of science. To his way of thinking, every discovery could always be made subservient to the forces of destruction as long as mankind had not reached its full spiritual maturity and as long as it was incapable of confining scientific advances to peaceful purposes.

"Science", he wrote, "has introduced us to Krupp's canons, to torpedoes, to dynamite, and so on; it quite likely has a lot of other surprises in store, to our future sorrow. If the slightest discovery, as Leibnitz said, acquires an infinitite value by virtue of the simple fact that it is common property to all nations and countries, what would he say today of the abuses made of science? After having been so dearly bought by governments, most of these new engines of death and destruction will more or less fall into the hands of the public and thereby contribute even more to future turmoil."²

When he wrote these lines, Henry Dunant had no notion that the inventor of dynamite would be the very reason for the resto-

¹ Henry Dunant to Dr. Hans Daae, 17 March 1900, Anders Daae Archives, Oslo
ration of his international prestige. Indeed, Alfred Nobel too had come to realize that scientific discoveries often went beyond what their inventor intended and that it was then too late to cry: "I never intended that." In the closing years of his life Nobel, influenced by Baroness von Suttner, decided to devote part of his wealth to found a prize for the man or institution "who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity among nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promoting of peace congresses". The provisions in his will (the broad outlines of which were known immediately after his death on 10 December 1896) were made public in 1898. At that time the Norwegian Parliament (responsible for administering the Nobel Peace Prize) was inundated by the candidatures of numerous partisans of peace, all of whom were well-deserving aspirants.

Among the candidates nominated, Henry Dunant was undoubtedly one of those with the most support. At the beginning of 1897 when, with Professor Rudolf Müller, he was completing the last chapter (the appendix) of his great work on the History of the Origins of the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention,¹ Dunant revealed what a great interest he took in the recently founded prize.

Rudolf Müller then acted to rally opinion in favour of Dunant, whom he considered particularly qualified to receive the prize.

Not everyone thought so. Some people even felt that the work of the Red Cross, although great, was distinct from the struggle for peace. We have seen how much Bertha von Suttner admired Henry Dunant's work and thought and how much she appreciated his commitment to peace movements; nevertheless she gave preference, at least for the first nomination, to Frédéric Passy, one of the earliest pioneers in the struggle against war.

Along with Rudolf Müller, Dr. Hans Daae, a medical officer in the Norwegian army, figures as one of Henry Dunant's most effective supporters. Their correspondence, which began in September 1898 and continued well after the award of the first Nobel Peace Prize, provides valuable information on Henry Dunant's thinking. Dunant immediately felt at ease with the Norwegian doctor, who had himself performed medical duties at the front during the war between Turkey and Greece and had published

¹ Rudolf Müller, Entstehungsgeschichte des Roten Kreuzes und der Genfer Konvention mit Unterstützung ihres Begründers J.H. Dunant, Stuttgart, Greiner & Pfeiffer, 1897
several small volumes describing his experiences. He was therefore in a good position to understand the work of the founder of the Red Cross.

In December 1898 Dr. Hans Daëe visited Dunant in Heiden after having met Rudolf Müller in Stuttgart, and proceeded to join with Rudolf Müller in attempting to persuade the Nobel Committee in Norway to award the prize to Dunant.¹

To provide a record, Dunant supplied his correspondent with abundant documentation on his work and publications: pamphlets, books and press articles. As he had done in his letters to Bertha von Suttner, he looked back and analysed the work he had carried out in the joint spheres of the Red Cross and the struggle for peace. He expounded his favourite theme: the Red Cross is a pathway leading to peace.

This analysis is particularly significant in one letter where Dunant traces the history of his own thought. Recalling the times when he was a guest of Count Eulenburg in Berlin and of the Crown Prince Frédéric in Potsdam in 1863, while he was developing his ideas about the future progress of the work of the Red Cross, he recollected the objectives which he expounded then to his hosts: the recruitment of voluntary hospital workers, a distinctive emblem for ambulances and hospitals, international congresses of Permanent Societies, a Humanitarian Convention between Governments. He went on as follows:

"My final great goal was to show what war is, so that all would be horrified at it. That is why I wrote my book A Memory of Solferino in 1861.—I hoped in this practical way—albeit indirectly—to contribute a little to the spread of ideas regarding international peace, arbitration and mediation.

"Everyone avowed that it was the first time the horrors of war had been laid bare and war depicted in all its frightful reality.

"It was, in point of fact, the horror of war that took me to Solferino."²

There followed an analytical summary of how his work had developed from Solferino until the pacifist era; in it he concentrated on showing that all the stages in the progress of humanitarian law and the law of peace had succeeded each other without

---

¹ See W. Heudtlass, J.H. Dunant and the events leading to the award of the first Nobel Peace Prize, in The International Review of the Red Cross, June 1964, pp. 283 ff.

² Henry Dunant to Hans Daæe, 23 May 1900, Anders Daæe Archives, Oslo
interruption since he first became involved in humanitarian work, and formed a logical chain of events:

"Thus, when my initial goal to assist the wounded had been attained, 1) by the International Conference in Geneva in October 1863, which founded the Work of the Red Cross; 2) by the Diplomatic Congress in August 1864, which produced the "Geneva Convention"; and 3) by being put into practical effect in Sadowa in 1866, I was concerned simultaneously with the question of peaceful arbitration amongst nations and with a draft Diplomatic Convention for Prisoners of War. I founded, first in Paris in 1871 and then in London in 1873, a 'Universal Alliance of Order and Civilization'. In 1872, large meetings of which I was the organizer took place in Paris, attended by the most distinguished men in France, who were sympathetic to these noble humanitarian questions. All the contemporary Parisian newspapers reported them and a large book was published containing the speeches that were made and the Resolutions that were adopted. These events gave rise to the 1874 Congress in Brussels, the Work of which was resumed in The Hague, by His Majesty the Czar, Nicolas II, in 1899.

"This sequence of events has been proved historically. The Congress of The Hague, known as the Peace Congress, was a decisive step—because it was a diplomatic congress—towards creating peace throughout the world."

*  

And so the wheel had come full circle. Over a fifty-year period of intellectual development Henry Dunant's humanitarian notions had become more extensive without his ever straying from the path he had traced out for himself and without his ever forgetting the revelation which, on the evening of Solferino, had decided his vocation in life. The honour of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for 1901—which he shared with Frédéric Passy—was the highest accolade he could have hoped for, public recognition for the greatness of his work and his thought.

We have seen that there were several candidates for the Nobel Prize. Among the friends of peace Dunant could rely upon enthusiastic supporters, in particular Princess Wiszniewska, President of the International Alliance of Women for Peace. Yet the pacifist, Alfred H. Fried, who was campaigning for Frédéric Passy, declared himself strongly opposed to the nomination of Henry Dunant.

Certainly both these great philanthropists had followed different paths. When faced with the problem of war in 1859, each had
reacted according to his natural inclination. Frédéric Passy had publicly protested against the war in Lombardy, whereas Dunant, amid the wounded in Solferino, had straightaway opted for protecting the victims. But it must be added that Henry Dunant and Frédéric Passy were soon to meet and think highly of each other; it was at Dunant's request that Frédéric Passy presented a paper on arbitration during the Congress of the Alliance of Order and Civilization in 1872 in Paris.¹ One may suppose that the Storting Committee in Norway, by sharing the prize between the founder of the Red Cross and the pioneer of pacifism, wished not only to give satisfaction to the supporters of both men but also to affirm that both movements were contributing to the struggle against war and complemented each other in the search for ways to bring about peace.

Bertha von Suttner immediately wrote to Dunant (11 December 1901) to congratulate him. She too felt that Frédéric Passy's work was more in line with what Alfred Nobel had intended than that of Henry Dunant.² But this great soul was too generous to show any reservations. Thinking only of her ideal, she requested Dunant to devote his newly-acquired fame to the cause of peace:

"The world in general knows you only as the founder of an Institution which alleviates war; I should like to publish a note addressed to me from you, and dated the day after your nomination for the Nobel Prize, to prove to the world that you are one of those who, having alleviated the effects of war, wish to abolish it altogether.

"And now let me once again repeat my congratulations. I am happy to think that this ray of gratitude, this honour, this tribute and this joy have come to lighten your loneliness.

Kindest regards,
B. Suttner" ³

¹ See Henry Dunant to Rudolf Müller, 4 September 1900, BPU, Fr. MS, 2112, p. 149.
² "... Awarding the Peace Prize to Dunant represented yet another concession to the idea which was to be found at the Conference of The Hague and which wishes to establish the doctrine that the only action to be taken against war should in reason be continued to its mitigation..." B. von Suttner, Memoiren, Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1909, p. 121 (translated from the German). Several of Dunant's correspondents or colleagues in the struggle for peace were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in the course of the following years: Elie Ducommun and C.A. Gobat (1902), Bertha von Suttner (1905), Fredrik Bajer (1909), the International Peace Bureau (1910) and Alfred Fried (1911).
³ Bertha von Suttner to Henry Dunant, 11 December 1901, BPU, Fr. MS 2112, p. 150
Dunant did not fail to comply with Baroness von Suttner's request, after some delay due to his poor health. On 25 December he sent her this very beautiful letter, dated as of 10 December 1901. After having paid tribute to his correspondent's work for peace, he took the trouble to recall the origin of his own feelings about peace and to emphasize—in Nobel's own terms—his role in the "work for fraternity among nations":

"Madam,

"I am pleased to pay tribute to you on this day when a telegram from Christiania has just informed me that I (along with my old and venerable colleague, Mr. Frédéric Passy) have been awarded the Alfred Nobel Peace Prize.

"This prize, Madam, is your doing; because it was through you that Mr. Nobel was introduced to the peace movement and, thanks to your entreaties, that he became its protector.

"For more than fifty years now, I myself have been an open supporter of peace amongst nations and a champion of the white flag. From my youth, my objective has always been fraternity among nations. As the founder of the Universal Work of the Red Cross and as promoter of the Geneva Diplomatic Convention of 22 August 1864, I say it and repeat it today more than ever.

"Believe me, Madam, in writing A Memory of Solferino my aim was directed at establishing universal peace; in so far as possible I wanted to convey the horror of war to all who read my pages.

"Nor, as time went by, was this a mistaken goal: to quote but one example, the eminent professor, Saint Marc Girardin, of the French Academy, said of my book in a masterly article in the Journal des Débats on 24 February 1863:

"'I would like this book to be widely read, particularly by those who love war and those who extol and glorify it.'

"About the same book Victor Hugo wrote to me:

"'You arm humanity and you serve freedom by causing war to be hated. (sic) I applaud your noble efforts!'

"I could long continue on this subject and quote to you, Madam, a host of similar testimonials from all kinds of leading people from all countries. But I must limit myself. I request Your Ladyship to accept
the tribute of my warm gratitude and have the honour to be your obedient servant.

Henri Dunant

10 December 1901"

Nothing could have been more to Baroness von Suttner’s liking and she replied to him on 30 December:

"Thank you so much! Your letter is everything I could have wished for: it shows with great clarity your convictions concerning the cause of peace. At the same time, what a delicate tribute you pay me by dating these lines to coincide with the telegram from Christiania. Thank you with all my heart."

As she had told Dunant, Baroness von Suttner forwarded his letter to l’Indépendance belge, a widely read Brussels newspaper. Under the heading A letter by Henry Dunant it was published in the edition which appeared on 4 January 1902. It was preceded by an introduction which shows us how difficult it appeared at the time to associate charitable humanitarianism with total pacifism:

"It is not quite clear whether Henry Dunant had the honour of sharing the Nobel Peace Prize with Frédéric Passy simply because he was the promoter of the Geneva Convention or also—and chiefly—because for many years he had been enrolled under the banner of peace. To lessen the horrors of war does not, in fact, mean fighting for peace—without being paradoxical one could maintain the opposite; and at any rate, merely the merit of having founded the Red Cross would not have entitled him to the Nobel Prize, which its founder clearly intended to be awarded to those who would do the most to establish international peace and eliminate standing armies.

It is interesting, in this regard, to read the following letter written by Henry Dunant to Baroness Bertha von Suttner, President of the Austrian Peace Society, on the day the Nobel Committee announced its decision:"

Baroness von Suttner once again enlisted Dunant in her cause, asking him to address a few words either to the Assembly or to herself on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Austrian Peace Society.

---

1 Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO. Dunant uses the word sic to emphasize the value of a passage. After the words quoted, Victor Hugo had continued: "To cause war to be hated is to cause kings to be hated. I applaud your noble efforts, and I send you my most sincere congratulations." (February 1871, BPU, Fr. MS 2110, p. 39)

2 There follows the entire text of Henry Dunant's letter. L'indépendance belge, 4 January 1902.
Dunant replied immediately in a carefully thought out letter perfectly suited to her purpose.

Addressing it to "Madam President", he describes himself "as an old man who for more than half a century has been a resolute partisan of world peace—in the future of which he firmly believes, despite all that may still happen between now and then". He congratulates the young Austrian Peace Society and encourages it "to fight with all its forces against this monstrosity known as war". "One must", he says, "open the present generation's eyes for the benefit of future generations" and "help to expand rapidly the Empire of Peaceful People, which in the end will spread over the whole earth". He finished by quoting from a speech by Pope Leo XIII (11 February, 1889) in favour of peace.¹

In addition Dunant sent a telegram requesting to be admitted as a life member of the Austrian Peace Society.²

Among the numerous letters of congratulation received from everywhere, and which piled up right to his bedroom ceiling, there is one which undoubtedly brought Henry Dunant great satisfaction, mingled perhaps with a certain nostalgia. It came from the President of the Genevese Society for Public Utility and says:

"Allow me, as President of the Genevese Society for Public Utility, to congratulate you warmly on having received one of the Nobel Peace Prizes.

"No one merited this distinction more than yourself, for it was you who, forty years ago, were instrumental in creating the International Standing Committee for Aid to Wounded Soldiers. Without you the Red Cross—the greatest humanitarian work of the nineteenth century—probably would not exist."³

*

In August 1902, the Copenhagen newspaper Spiegel asked Henry Dunant the following question:

"How should one work to bring about universal peace? Do you think this can be achieved by the pressure of public opinion; or do you feel that this idea can succeed only by the accession of Heads of State and by diplomatic means?

"Do you believe in the possibility of a peace union?"

¹ Henry Dunant to Bertha von Suttner, 1 January 1902, Suttner-Fried Collection, UNO
² Quoted by Bertha von Suttner, Memoiren, p. 521
³ Professor E. Goegg to Henry Dunant, 2 January 1902, BPU MS 2112, p. 358
In his reply Dunant naturally combines both approaches:

"In civilized countries the movement must take its strength from public opinion. But it is equally important to persuade Heads of State to accept this idea to bring nearer the moment when universal peace might be achieved by diplomatic means. States desire peace. The noble initiative by H.E. Emperor Nicholas II has given us irrefutable proof of this. Nevertheless, in certain States the peaceful inclinations of sovereigns must be supported and strengthened by manifestations of public opinion." ¹

Here one finds the ideas which Dunant frequently expressed in his writings and in his manifestos. Since States have the power to wage war, peace can be ensured only by means of diplomatic agreements. But public opinion can exert powerful pressure on Heads of State, who symbolize the will of nations. Therefore, he wrote, increasing influence should be brought to bear on public opinion, which will then in turn affect diplomacy and governments. "If public opinion lies dormant or if its salutary vigilance is suspended, general indifference will spread also to the governments of different nations."

Indeed, we know today that public opinion is fickle and that the ambitions of States rarely induce moderation. We know that it is not always easy to reconcile the principle of non-violence with the thirst for justice and the desire for freedom. The analysis of the causes of belligerence has reached an extremely refined level, but the ways of preventing it have not kept pace. Throughout his lengthy peace crusade Henry Dunant was quite aware that the struggle he was engaged in would not attain its objectives rapidly and that it might be a matter of some centuries, unless vigorous action achieved them sooner. All the more reason, he felt, to devote all efforts to it without delay.

Utopia or reality? For those who spoke of Utopia Henry Dunant already had his answer: "Yesterday's Utopia often becomes tomorrow's reality."

André Durand

¹ From an article in the Journal de Genève, 24 September 1927 entitled "Henri Dunant et la Paix". The article from the magazine Der Spiegel was reprinted in the review Die Friedens-Warte (13/15 July 1902, fourth year, UNO Archives), with a critical commentary on the question posed and the reply.