

HENRY DUNANT, MAN OF DESTINY

As indicated in its subtitle, this book¹ brings to light "something new about the family, the early years and the spiritual destiny of the founder of the Red Cross". Through the written word and numerous reproductions of drawings and engravings, the opening pages of the book give a vivid and appealing description of Geneva in the early 19th century, setting the scene on to which the author then brings characters of whom so far very little has been known: Henry Dunant's grandfather, who was a wandering banker, dogged by misfortune; an animal-loving uncle, with humanitarian and pacifist leanings; Dunant's father, who spent twenty years as a merchant in Marseilles; his gentle, sensitive mother. In the next section the author describes Geneva during the period of Christian revivalism, the agitation and restlessness of the city's youth, and the creation of the World Federation of Young Men's Christian Unions, whose records show Henry Dunant to have been its first founding member.

All those elements build up gradually to the horrifying experience of Solferino, which was to affect Henry Dunant so deeply that it changed the course of his life. The author explains how Dunant's background, the people and the events described, moulded his character and influenced his upbringing and sensitivity, leading him to react as he did when he came face to face with the horrors of war. It is in this sense that he can be described as "predestined".

We should pay tribute to the author, historian and President of the Evangelical Society of Geneva, for his graphic portrayal of Geneva and its inhabitants in the first half of the 19th century.

¹ Gabriel Mützenberg: *Henry Dunant le prédestiné*. Henry Dunant Society, Geneva, 1984. Published under the aegis of the Evangelical Society, in association with Editions Robert-Estienne. 166 pages. French only.