

Conventions. In this connection, Mr. Knitel writes: "Does not ICRC action, prompted by human necessity and consented to by States, constitute case law! It is for this reason that we consider the provisions conferring the right of initiative on the International Committee as the international community's invitation to the ICRC to establish precedents in the humanitarian law of nations and thereby bridge the gaps of positive international law. Any other construction could only deprive this article of its significance, for what would be the use of these provisions stipulating that the Conventions shall not stand in the Committee's way if this right of initiative had not previously been granted it?"

The stipulation of article 3 of the Geneva Conventions that "in the case of armed conflicts not of an international character . . . the ICRC . . . may offer its services to the Parties to the conflict" is but another aspect of its right of initiative. Since 1949 the ICRC's offer can no longer be labelled as interference in the internal affairs of a State.

"It would be desirable", the author concludes, "that specific rules should reinforce the ways in which the ICRC can act in all situations which are not of the nature of an international armed conflict, without however restricting its right of initiative."

J. P.

Perspectives d'application de l'ordinateur au domaine médical (Scope for the Computer in Medicine), by Dr. G. Mérier, *Revue Suisse des Infirmières*, Soleure, April 1969.

Every day, the computer is breaking into new fields of human activity. It is obvious that it will not be only a status symbol, a passing fashion, but will be a landmark in modern progress, an important step forward in history like the discovery of the wheel, the harnessing of energy and the development of printing.

Medicine will not remain on the fringe of this evolution. The computer's methodological approach will change medical work and thinking. However, the fascinating possibilities opened up by electronics should frighten no one. The fear that the computer will come between the doctor and nurse and the patient must be dissipated. Computer language is becoming more and more adapted to medical logic, and software more

flexible and more appropriate to hospital and public health work, thus bringing the computer within easier reach. In addition, the computer is used for processing data on clinical research, for automatic monitoring or statistical appraisals. Put to proper use, the computer performs all sorts of repetitive jobs and relieves nurses and doctors of part of their work on medical charts thus leaving them more time for the patient. At the same time, analytical capacity reinforced by statistical method, probability and operational research, will reform medical thinking.

Computer feeding and automatic processing of medical data necessitates their being broken down into simple and logical elements. This effort alone is often at the origin of worthwhile methodological reforms. From the nurse's point of view, the change will undoubtedly involve an improvement in the accuracy of noting vital symptoms, the observation of patients (particularly in intensive treatment and post-operation wards) and the administration of medicaments. This effort will be largely offset by the release from repetitive and tedious tasks and a certain amount of detailed recording on charts.

War, the imponderable, by René Carrère, *Guerres et Paix*, Paris, 1969, No. 1.

On the road to Thebes, Oedipus was confronted by the Sphinx which he vanquished by giving the right answer to its riddle. His destiny was to continue developing in keeping with the fatality of old or the will of the gods, with a succession of murders and a war against Thebes. Like the course of history, we cannot change mythology which reflects civilizations' awareness of their destiny. All we can do is to formulate a hypothesis of no particular value.

If, instead of proposing a relatively simple enigma, the Sphinx had asked Oedipus a more difficult question: "What is war and what is the reason for war?" the answer would have been more difficult and, in any case, controversial. The Sphinx would have devoured Oedipus as he had done previous travellers. Man would have been vanquished by the Monster, for to define war and its function has proved, over the centuries, to be a matter of chance, as, like Proteus, it assumes various and unexpected forms.

Yet this question "What is war, as a social phenomenon and what is the reason for war?" is capital. The reply has been sought for a long time but never found.

Some twenty years ago, with the threat of nuclear war, a new approach was tried: *polemology, or the sociological study of war, the scientific study of war and peace, in themselves and in relation to each other*. Although, by reason of the subject studied, it is akin to the traditional sciences of warfare (strategy, tactics, logistics, sociological and