

How the “Bulletin international” Started

Origin

In a report which he had submitted to one of the preparatory committees for the first International Conference of National Aid Societies for the Nursing of the Sick and Wounded in the Field (which meetings were the predecessors of the International Conferences of the Red Cross) at Paris in 1867, Huber-Saladin, one of the French government delegates, put forward the idea “of a jointly financed publication in Geneva, in the form of a journal, or a periodical bulletin to which every Central Committee would contribute news items”. The International Committee, of which Gustave Moynier was president, adopted this idea and shortly afterwards, in its ninth circular of 21 September 1867, submitted it to the Central Committees which had been previously consulted and had given their approval.

In its circular, the Committee put forward definite proposals on, *inter alia*, the monthly publication of this “Journal international”, an annual budget and the kind of articles which would appear in it, such as:

- a) communications which the International Committee or the National Committees wished to bring to the knowledge of all members of the movement;
- b) information on the activities of the various committees both in time of peace and of war;
- c) bibliographical information;

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- d) memoirs, speeches, letters, etc. on matters affecting the movement's functions and progress;
- e) all sorts of communications concerning the subject of our work.

The International Committee had these proposals printed on 20 June 1868 in the form of a memorandum to participants in the second International Conference which was held at Berlin in April 1869. That meeting straightway approved of the principle that a bulletin should be issued. It discussed the project in outline, but not the practical details, and summarized its conclusions as follows:

The Conference considers essential the publication of a journal through which Central Committees of various countries may maintain contact and learn of official events and other facts which they should know.

Editing of this journal is entrusted to the International Committee of the Red Cross without, however, any expense therefor being incurred by the members of that Committee.

The frequency of publication of this journal will be decided by the members of the Committee.

Part of the journal may be reserved for announcements, reports on special work and descriptions of appliances or inventions useful in the alleviation of the plight of military wounded or sick."

On the strength of this imperative resolution by the Berlin Conference, the International Committee, on 15 June of the same year, in its 16th circular to Central Committees, submitted a programme for the international periodical. Before specifying any technical details on subscriptions, printing and publication (in the meantime the Committee had decided not to publish monthly, but quarterly) it put forward principles which with little change prevailed until 1919.

The International Committee, in which Central Committees have placed their trust, is pleased to be able in this manner to perform a useful service in the promotion of an institution to which it has devoted itself entirely. It also welcomes its new terms of reference

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according to which it will undertake to strengthen the more frequent and regular ties of kinship with the Central Committees.

It is the latter which, as required by the Berlin Conference, are to supply material for the Bulletin. It is understood that this collection of writings will be the organ of Central Committees for the distribution of news of interest to them and in which they alone will be entitled to publish articles, thereby enhancing the Bulletin and conferring on it a somewhat official character. The International Committee will assemble, co-ordinate and publish contributions, adding any special news where required.

This combined effort implies that each Central Committee will take steps to be able to work for the Bulletin by supplying full details concerning its own country. The requirements for a substantial publication will certainly not be lacking providing those concerned take sufficient interest. The International Committee therefore hopes that Central Committees, convinced of this, will help it in every way they can by advice and co-operation so that their collective Bulletin may be worthy of the great movement it is designed to serve.

The Bulletin's scope will include not only the work, personnel and organization of Central Committees and Relief Societies, but also facts concerning the official medical services or charitable organizations working for the same aims, new publications (books, brochures, newspaper articles), inventions designed to improve the condition of the wounded, and so forth.

Central Committees will also be able to use the Bulletin to convey their ideas, to raise questions and seek solutions to problems of concern to them.

Communications from each Committee will be published under its own responsibility. They may be split into as many distinct articles as there are subjects for discussion.

The First Bulletin

The first issue of the *Bulletin international des Sociétés de secours aux militaires blessés* was published in Geneva in October 1869. It contained 60 pages with a wealth of material which demonstrated that the National Aid Societies were active in various countries, that they were ambitious and that the International

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Committee for Aid to Wounded Soldiers—which a few years later was to become the International Committee of the Red Cross—was already anxious to make known the Geneva Convention signed in 1864 and to investigate all applications thereof.

According to this first issue, for example, promotion of the principles of the Geneva Convention consisted not only of the spread of knowledge on them in the armed forces and the public; it was intended also to reach experts in international law whose opinions, in the absence of positive laws, gave force to the practice which civilized nations considered themselves bound to respect. It was this which induced the International Committee "to submit this subject to one of the justifiably renown learned bodies: l'Institut de France."

In addition, Gustave Moynier had just published a 400 page book. A review in the Bulletin described his *Etudes sur la Convention de Genève* as one of the books which "disseminates the knowledge necessary to ensure the full observance and effectiveness of the Convention". Such dissemination was already receiving attention from the Geneva Committee. It was because he considered the Convention to be very inadequately known that Moynier spoke on it with feeling at the Berlin Conference.

This first issue of the Bulletin began with a foreword of tribute to Relief Societies whose increasing activities had extended the movement widely in Europe, Asia and in America. The text, all the way through to its conclusion on the Red Cross and Peace, is still of such topical interest that we believe it worthwhile reproducing it here, even if only to recall in what spirit the founding committee conceived of Red Cross action nationally and internationally.

The Red Cross on the frontispiece is too familiar an emblem to members of the Societies publishing this Bulletin for it to be necessary to remind them of its significance. But this new compendium of texts is not for them alone. At the same time as it seeks to improve the work to which it is dedicated, it must also be an instrument of promotion in its favour. Hence, it would be wise to consider the possibility that the people we wish to win over to our cause have scant acquaintance with it, and, in this brief preamble, to bring them up to date on what it is about.

BULLETIN INTERNATIONAL

DES

SOCIÉTÉS DE SECOURS AUX MILITAIRES BLESSÉS

PUBLIÉ PAR

LE COMITÉ INTERNATIONAL



GENÈVE

IMPRIMERIE SOULLIER ET WIRTH, CITÉ, 19-21

OCTOBRE 1869

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We must first justify in their eyes the existence of our Aid Societies to the Wounded, for they might with every reason be surprised that voluntary associations make bold to discharge a mission which is incumbent essentially on governments and, in fact, already undertaken by them, since in all civilized armies there is a regular medical service. The reason for our Relief Societies is nothing less than the inadequacy of those official services, incontrovertibly demonstrated today and no longer concealed by the governments themselves. There is, however, no question of disbanding what is already in existence, but of supplementing it, and the aim assigned to the zeal of Relief Societies is only to help the military administration in every conceivable way.

The bases for the organization of these Relief Societies were laid in Geneva in 1863 at a conference composed for the most part of men of expert knowledge and of influence from various countries of Europe.

The factor which distinguishes these Societies from those which previously occasionally came to the assistance of war victims is their permanent character, even in time of peace. The underlying truth is that relief improvised in time of need is always inadequate and that in this sphere charity cannot rise to the occasion unless prepared well beforehand.

The present-day Relief Societies differ from their predecessors also by their international character, that is to say, by their pronounced intention of aiding one another and distributing their benefits among all the unfortunate within their reach without discriminating between friend and foe.

The red cross on a white background is the flag whose protection they seek, and it is at the same time the sign by which all army medical services are identified.

We cannot discuss here the activities of the Relief Societies in full detail as we would wish; we must refer readers desiring to go into the subject more thoroughly to the special writings on this matter. This brief review would, however, not be complete if we did not adumbrate the usefulness of a movement which, born only yesterday as it were, has already rendered such signal service.

Relief Societies existing in nearly all countries of Europe and whose network extends to Asia and America have proved themselves

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conclusively on the field of battle and in hospitals during the war of 1866. Moreover, for the official medical services, they were a stimulus; by calling public attention to shortcomings, they have set the medical services on the road to reforms and in several countries great progress has been achieved under the influence of this noble emulation. It is also due to the initiative of the Relief Societies that we owe the Geneva Convention which has legally transferred to the law of nations the beneficent doctrine of protection for the wounded and those who tend them.

The Relief Societies made good use of their first years of existence. Nevertheless, we have observed a reproach which has often been levelled at them. Their first concern, it is said, should not be to relieve the suffering of the wounded but to root out the evil and ensure lasting peace for the nations. It is not sufficient today for philanthropists to attenuate the evils of war; they should seek a higher ideal. Those who give voice to this objection forget, no doubt, that there are associations whose purpose is precisely to make war on war and, therefore, that the most noble hopes of the modern spirit are not ignored. They should bear in mind that pending the triumph of these friends of peace, wisdom demands that we be ready for any eventuality.

This, Relief Societies have understood; but when carrying out the task which has been assigned to them, they neglect no opportunity to proclaim that what they desire most is peace and the absence of need of their services. Moreover, they are convinced that they are useful auxiliaries to peaceful propaganda and that they make a genuine contribution, albeit indirect, to the instilment of a distaste for war in the minds of men. The necessity which forces them to depict the horrors in order to justify their action—the universal sympathy which they seek in the name of charity for the benefit of the unfortunate victims who suffer—the display of their equipment which seems to portend so much suffering: all that impresses and gives rise to salutary reflexion which cannot but bear fruit.

The Red Cross, which does so much good, must therefore be dear to the friends of humanity.

* * *

In this first issue, interesting details were given on the organization and early action of the National Aid Societies for the Wounded in Austria, Baden, Belgium, France, North Germany, Great Britain, Hesse, Italy, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States of America.

It is therefore immediately apparent that the *Bulletin international* was a faithful and well informed witness of the movement, since Societies in fourteen countries were mentioned, all of which, with the exception of the Turkish Society which was definitively founded only in April 1869, were the subject of a detailed account. Furthermore, this first issue came off the press after many letters and circulars to Central Committees, whose subscriptions were to cover the financing.¹

At the end of last century

The Vth International Conference of Red Cross Societies took place in Rome in April 1892. Important questions were discussed and participants, welcomed with extreme generosity, realized what it was which united them and they were certain that the work which they had undertaken was making constant progress. Gustave Moynier, who had been elected Honorary Chairman of that large meeting, was unable to attend, as his state of health prevented him from going to Rome.

He must have been far from well to contemplate, as shown in the document quoted hereunder, the possibility of having to hand over to someone else the heavy responsibility which he had assumed almost unaided. This no doubt explains why he wrote his "Notes administratives" in May of that year.

His notes give modest and pleasant details on the editing and administration of the *Bulletin international*, nearly a quarter of a century after its foundation and at a time when it had assumed a predominant place among Red Cross reviews. We think our readers will be interested in this document which shows that the publication was still at the "craftsman" phase and that the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross was involved

¹ See P. Boissier, *De Solferino à Tsoushima, Histoire du CICR*, Paris, 1963.

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in the minute details of the Bulletin, each quarterly issue of which contained nearly sixty pages.

V. Bulletin

The decision to publish the Bulletin was reached at the 1869 Berlin Conference. It was confirmed by the Karlsruhe Conference in 1887, and has been the subject of several articles in the Bulletin itself.

The number of the Bulletin pages varies depending on the volume of material to be published. Over the first twenty-two years, the average number of pages for each issue was 56 and the president is endeavouring to maintain this number.

Research for material requires continuous attention, either to make use of documents received or to provoke communications and other despatches from Central Committees, friends of the Red Cross, bookshops, etc.

The President keeps a careful note on loose-leaf paper of all prospective articles for each Bulletin. He keeps progressive notes of the action taken in respect of each one of them and of the persons to whom he gives the documents to be used, in order to keep a control on their subsequent return.

Mr. Albert Gampert generally prepares the articles drawn from French and German sources. For other languages and for technical articles, the President turns to other contributors, particularly to the Central Committees of the countries in which the articles originate (Greece, Serbia, Holland, etc.), to members of the International Committee or, in case of need, to salaried staff. The President himself often writes articles when the subject is particularly delicate or requires accurate knowledge on Red Cross history.

In addition, no article is sent to the printer without having been read by the President and, if need be, corrected, completed or abbreviated by him.

Mr. Gampert has to deliver the copy to the Imprimerie Soullier no later than the first of the month in which the Bulletin will appear (January, April, July or October). We

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must see to it that the Bulletin is ready before the end of the month, and in fact this deadline has rarely been exceeded.

Proofs are corrected twice, by the President and by Mr. Gampert.

It is recommended:

1. to include in each issue any changes in Central Committee addresses or International Committee membership on the cover;
2. to attach to the January issue the title of the volume;
3. to finish the October issue with a table of the contents for the full year.

A table of contents covering a decade was published in the 40th issue of the Bulletin and twenty years in the 80th.

After the publication of each issue, the President sends a summary to the *Journal de Genève* for publication under the heading: "Quarterly Red Cross Chronicle".

Once the issue has been printed, Mr. Soullier sends Mr. Labarthe the necessary number of copies for the subscribers service, which sees to the despatch.

The subscribers list is kept in duplicate, one copy by Mr. Labarthe and the other by the President.

To the inside of the cover page of the President's copy is stuck a sheet on which changes are noted as they occur and payments made. A copy of this is given Mr. Labarthe every quarter, before distribution of an issue. The same changes and payments are marked also in the register opposite the name of the subscriber concerned.

Some subscribers pay direct to the President, in which case he immediately sends them a receipt. Mr. Labarthe deals with collection from subscribers who are two years behind with their payments.

The Bulletin has always paid for itself and it has never been necessary to have recourse to a financial guarantee from Central Committees.

In the small office (central section of the shelves) there are some full collections of the Bulletin which must be continued with care. In the right hand section there are odd issues of the whole series except those which are out-of-print and on the floor beneath the window there is the unsorted remainder.

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Subscription for all countries is Fr. 6.—.

The price of a separate number is Fr. 1,50.

Mr. Gampert's fee is Fr. 150.— per issue.

The members of the International Committee of the Red Cross having always given their President considerable latitude to settle as he thinks fit the administrative details concerning their common interests, he alone knows most of the habits he has developed in this respect and of which the suitability has been demonstrated by long experience. Now this is an unfortunate state of affairs, in that if from one day to the next the management of the Committee's affairs should have to be passed to other hands, the continuity of his traditions would be broken and the Committee would lose the benefit of a well-tried organization.

Such is the consideration which has induced the undersigned to set out in detail, in the following pages, the manner in which he is accustomed to proceed, in order to leave for a successor a sort of *vade-mecum*, which will spare him much hesitation and groping.

G. Moynier

For a further six years, Moynier continued in this manner to edit each issue of the Bulletin. However, in 1898, his strength failing, he announced his intention to retire from the presidency of the International Committee—he nevertheless remained in office until his death in 1910—and at the same time give up this administrative function which was entrusted to Paul Des Gouttes, a young legal expert who later became an outstanding personality in the Red Cross movement.

From the "Bulletin" to the "Revue"

Coming back to the foundation of the *Bulletin international*, we would mention that it had been one of the ICRC's first concerns not to affect adversely the journals then being published by a number of Central Committees. At the time, *La Charité sur les champs de bataille* was being published in Belgium, a review had been published in France since 1865, and the *Kriegerheil* was the

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organ of the Prussian Central Committee. The first two of these went out of circulation in 1877 but similar publications had appeared in Spain, Russia and Sweden.

Seven years later, six National Societies were producing periodicals: two in German (Berlin and Zurich), and others in Russian, Swedish, Spanish and English (Boston). The editors of the *Bulletin international* could therefore conclude that they were doing no harm to the movement's other publications. "A close study of the matter", they observed, "shows clearly that any apprehension which may be entertained in this respect is groundless."

In its 41st circular in 1877, the International Committee stated "We have never regretted our deference to the wish of the Berlin Conference, for we have therein found a means of usefully serving the work we founded... Through the Bulletin, we are in effect consolidating the permanent moral unity of all Central Committees, keeping them informed on matters of common interest, and we are furthering their progress by emulation, by initiating them into their work." "But", the ICRC added, "although it is not in the nature of a popular publication, the Bulletin can aspire to a far greater readership than it has today."

In the January issue of 1880 is an article on the start of the Bulletin's second decade. "It is a pity it was not started earlier... If the Red Cross, from the beginning had had an official historiographer, what important events could have been recorded! But the need was felt only later, when the Red Cross had proved itself and when the great future before it was realized."

The International Committee continued nevertheless to ask itself, not about the review's existence or necessity, since the 1884 International Conference in Geneva had approved the Committee's conclusions and restated that the Bulletin "is a useful organ of Aid Societies for the Wounded", but about the changes which could be introduced.

This subject was raised in two circulars to the Central Red Cross Committees; one dated 16 February 1885, the other 18 October 1894. In the first, however, there is the perceptible doubt of an institution still hesitant about its very constitution and the practical methods to be used in the future. "If you are in favour of the continuation of this periodical", wrote Gustave Moynier, the President,

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and Gustave Ador, the Secretary, "we should be pleased to know what improvements you would like to see introduced." The tone of the second circular, on the other hand, was different. One hundred issues were a *raison d'être* and justified continued effort along the lines laid down:

We therefore consider the experience of the last twenty-five years encouraging and that the future of the Bulletin international des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge is assured for a long time ahead, if our honorable correspondents are kind enough to continue the friendly support which they have given us so far. They have not forgotten, and we are grateful for it, that the Bulletin is not published by the International Committee in its own interest, but in that of all National Red Cross Societies. It is available to them as a convenient means of exchanging useful news among themselves, and it is at the same time the means essential in time of peace to keep alive the spirit of fraternity and solidarity which is the inspiration underlying their joint work. We ourselves feel keenly the need for the Bulletin from this twofold point of view, and we look upon it as a valuable instrument which enables us to contribute constantly to the development of the institution for which we took the initiative more than thirty years ago

It will be noticed that in this circular the title used is not *Bulletin international des Sociétés de secours aux militaires blessés*: it became the *Bulletin international des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* in 1886. Under this name, unchanged until 1919, the International Committee's quarterly continued with little alteration in the cover, layout and content.

* * *

Then, in January 1919, a new Revue appeared which absorbed the Bulletin. It was a monthly, and from that time on was known as the *Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge*. Here, incidentally, is how the change was announced by the Steering Committee, presided over by the Bulletin editor, Paul Des Gouttes:

In the course of these four years of war, the Red Cross Societies of belligerent countries and of several neutrals have seen their scope

REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE LA CROIX-ROUGE



BULLETIN INTERNATIONAL DES SOCIÉTÉS DE LA CROIX-ROUGE

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widened on an unexpected scale and they have been able to meet new obligations thanks to the assistance of all sorts which they have engendered. The work they have had to perform is by no means on the decline. At the most it will change. Instead of merely dressing wounds, the Red Cross seeks to remedy the evils of war; it will devote all its strength to solving the great problems, so far barely touched upon, of rehabilitation of the disabled, of war on tuberculosis and, in a broader sense, it will henceforth constantly strive to alleviate human distress.

The International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva has followed with sympathy and attention the efforts of charity in all countries. In its own sphere of action, more moral than material, it has by appeals, protests and contact through its delegates, continually reminded governments that they must observe the all too often violated Conventions. At the same time, through its International Prisoners of War Agency and the millions of requests of all sorts it has received and tried to satisfy, it is in close contact with all forms of anguish and distress.

But this direct action, imposed by the necessities of war, is only temporary: its role is especially to ensure liaison among the various Red Cross Societies and co-ordinate their efforts. In order the better to discharge its obligations, it has decided to give wider publicity to reports of charitable activities.

The quarterly Bulletin international which has been publishing reports from Central Red Cross Committees for the last forty years, is now to become a monthly, and in addition to the official section with news from every Red Cross there will be articles on all assistance questions of general interest, in which everyone may freely give their points of view, denounce injustice, call for help. It will give space to any national study likely to interest other nations, but it will of course reserve space in the first place for works of comparison, summaries and discussions on principles.

By broadening its Bulletin and founding a Revue internationale de la Croix-Rouge, the International Committee purports to strengthen one of the few links which war has not broken and at the same time, on its own ground, to prepare for forthcoming International Conferences of the Red Cross which, in a future which we hope is not too distant, will again bring together representatives of all countries.

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From that time on, apart from the leading articles, the Revue reported on the activities of the ICRC and the National Societies. Within a cover weighed down by many details at the start, but progressively simplified, the *Revue internationale* was published in French only; this considerably restricted its circulation.

After the Second World War, the question of publication in other languages arose and in 1948 an English supplement was issued, with some of the main items of each month's Revue. Then, in 1949, there appeared the Spanish supplement, followed in 1950 by the German. In 1961, the Revue was published also in English, under the title of *International Review of the Red Cross*.

These four versions are today read in all countries and its circulation constantly increases. It has never tried to be a popular publication, but to remain what its founders wanted it to be: the faithful and objective witness of the Red Cross mission in Geneva and the world, the organ of Red Cross principles through which its doctrine is developed, a reflection of the constructive effort which continues in all latitudes, in all civilizations, for the defence of man and his dignity.

* * *

It is certain that we no longer employ the same terms as the founders of the Red Cross. The world today, in terms of humanitarian action, is different from theirs. However, in this Centenary year of our publication the editor can continue to take his inspiration, as his predecessors did (to Paul Des Gouttes' name should be added the names of Etienne Clouzot, Jean Charles de Watteville, Henri Reverdin and Louis Demolis) from the design announced in an editorial of the *Bulletin international* of January 1880:

"We will remain at our post and continue to record things which have been accomplished, with the conviction of thus fulfilling a useful if modest role and making our own contribution for the work undertaken to move gradually nearer to its ideal".