

Fifty years of the “Review”

“ Oh, War is not dead! ” cried Henry Dunant at the end of the last century, observing with rigorous penetration that “ To judge the past in the light of Holy Writ, after studying the long succession of centuries fraught with wars, is to see history as an indelible indictment of the human species ”.

The *International Review of the Red Cross*, whose fifty years cover the period of the worst bloodshed, the most blood-stained chapter of history, would be the most accusing document in the trial of humanity.

How many wars and international crises; how many atrocities; how much human suffering—on the fields of battle, in prison camps and in occupied territories where people lead an aimless life, deprived of food, medical supplies, shelter and everything else—what terrible events and profound upheavals are recorded in the pages of this Review for today’s readers! This periodical is first and foremost a faithful mirror of the inexorable march of time since the first great world holocaust.

The chronicle starts with the sequels of the First World War: visits to prison camps, repatriation of prisoners, mutual accusation lodged with the International Committee by belligerents concerning breaches of the Geneva and The Hague Conventions. Then came the civil war in Russia followed by the infernal welter of successive local or international crises where the protagonists of conflicting ideologies, power-thirsty governments and people yearning

for independence and freedom came to grips to the detriment of mankind. This cycle was interrupted only by an event even more terrible and revolting; the devastation and world-wide slaughter of the Second World War.

As it does in respect of less extensive conflicts, the Review bears witness, for hundred of pages, many of them illustrated by frightful but realistic photos, to the activities of the International Red Cross: International Committee delegates at the front, in camps, among the wounded, among the prisoners of war and interned civilians; representatives of the League of Red Cross Societies and National Red Cross Societies providing relief—a glass of milk, a blanket, life-saving medicines—to people in distress, the wretched victims of forces beyond their comprehension and against which they are defenceless.

The Review is also a witness to a fatal degeneration of international ethics; during the Second World War, it did not record any protests from belligerents who, twenty years earlier, to condemn their enemies' acts which they deemed incompatible with the norms established by general consensus, would have turned to the custodian of those norms—the central Red Cross body. No humanitarian rules are respected when strategic interests dictate otherwise: war is waged without pity; barbarity is admitted and condoned.

In spite of its ceaseless efforts, the Red Cross cannot provide assistance to all in need. The Review relates not only the activity of its representatives but also the appeals it launches, the position it adopts and the explanation it offers to those who accuse it of inaction. It is true that the Red Cross has its limits. It cannot take sanctions against breaches of humanitarian rules, for there is no universally respected ethic. For example, it could not gain access to concentration camps; even to-day it is prevented from feeding starving children and it still seeks ways and means of intervening in fratricidal wars which thwart rules dependent on the good will of the parties engaged in conflicts.

There are two fields in which this undertaking of the Red Cross is carried on, with the aim of broadening the scope of humanitarian action and of improving resources, namely the law of war, and medical equipment and personnel. In the former, a determined effort is

being made to change the Geneva Conventions to meet the realities of constant evolution in order:

to draw conclusions from the rapid developments of modern science and technology whilst extending the protection afforded by established rules—in the hope that they will be respected—to cover not only soldiers and prisoners but also women, old people and children or, in other words, to civilian population in need;

to break the grip of sacrosanct national sovereignty so that relief and consolation may be brought to the victims of internal conflicts which are becoming more and more frequent due to the fear of the destructive potential of atomic war on a world scale; and

to forbid chemical, bacteriological and nuclear weapons which human ingenuity has made available in the service of death.

A regular feature appeared for years on this subject. It was related to "the protection of civilian populations against aero-chemical warfare", gave an analysis of measures taken against chemical and bacteriological warfare in several countries and studied these new methods of fighting.

In addition, the Review periodically reminds its readers, in articles written by the most knowledgeable authors, of the principles of humanitarian action of which Red Cross institutions are the depository and the guardians.

Efforts are exerted to make relief material resources on the field of battle ever more effective. On this subject, and especially during the inter-world war period, the Review has published studies and reports by commissions and specialised institutions on the improvement of stretchers and mountain transport equipment for use by the armed forces medical services and National Societies, and on the medical aircraft which began after the 1914-18 war. Today, such studies may to us seem out-moded, but they do show how serious attention was given to practical problems of relief to the wounded.

Medical personnel training, recruitment, teaching methods and working conditions are also dealt with at length in the Review which closely follows efforts to improve the standards of such personnel. Particular attention is given to female nurses; questions related to their work take up more and more space in the columns

of the Review. Similarly, rehabilitation of the wounded and disabled and the constant attention which the Review gives to these questions show how concerned the Red Cross is for the victims of wars and natural disasters.

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Before 1919, relief in time of war was the main concern of the Red Cross. From that year, concomitantly with the founding of the League of Red Cross Societies, another problem was tackled by the Red Cross: relief in natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and famine. The Review then began reporting on these new activities and the ever increasing assistance provided by the League in various quarters of the globe.

Innumerable humanitarian actions by Red Cross institutions are recorded in the pages of the Review which, even in its early years viewed broad horizons on a world scale. It thus became the mouthpiece of inchoate international co-operation.

The proposal by the Italian senator Ciraoio with a view to co-ordinating the efforts of member States of the League of Nations to increase assistance to the victims of natural disasters proportionate to their distress, and the proceedings of the body set up as a result of that proposal—the International Relief Union—were followed by the Review with close attention.

At the same time, the Review gave an account on the changing problems of child welfare and particularly the work of the International Union for Child Welfare founded to co-ordinate efforts on a world scale to provide a better life for future generations. It also attached great importance to the codification of human rights in the Universal Declaration and in the European Convention, and some of its pages were devoted to penetrating analyses of the interdependence between these rights and the ideals of the Red Cross.

Editors of the Review could not ignore the refugees who, following wholesale in the wake of military defeats, implacable ideological persecutions or pogroms motivated by racial or other hatred, became more and more a feature of our unhappy times. Their problems and the relief given to them unsparingly by the Red

Cross and other international organizations, such as the UN High Commissioner, are accurately related and examined. International agreements for their protection and assistance are described and analysed.

A word must also be said on migration—a phenomenon as old as mankind itself but an everyday occurrence in our modern world. These movements and the development of activities by institutions especially concerned with this modern problem, such as the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, are regularly covered by the Review.

The Review devotes more and more space to international co-operation. During the last 25 years we have seen emerge onto the world scene the countries of the "Third World". Other civilizations apart from the "Euro-Christian", such as those of Islam, India and China, have been given prominence. Articles by such authorities as Louis Massignon, Paul Masson-Oursel and Paul Demiéville have explained the humanitarian idea and the concept of "service to one's fellow man" elsewhere than in Europe where the Red Cross was born, and they also deal with legal and moral rules inseparable from these civilizations and similar to the standards laid down by the humanitarian Conventions.

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Apart from these great themes in which history is confronted with the human condition in the world today, the Review discusses the Red Cross world's own problems: various aspects of the functioning of its international and national institutions, practical difficulties and outstanding events in its history. Some of the chapter headings are regular features, such as the International Committee's annual reports on its activities, its finances and the management of the various funds of which it is the trustee, the reports by various National Societies which appeared in the "Bulletin" which continues to be published as part and parcel of the Review.

In this connection, the early years of the Review were marked by an event, namely the foundation of the second international body of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies. In the

pages of the Review we can trace step by step the League's development, oriented mainly to the discharge of peacetime missions; we may observe the quest for a dividing line between the work of the ICRC and that of the League; we may read about the continuous adjustment of Red Cross structures both national and international.

Other major concerns of Red Cross leaders, described in the Review, are problems relating to the sign, the protection it affords and the dissemination of knowledge of the Geneva Conventions. The nature and significance of the sign, the danger latent in its multiplication, the aspects of its function and the need to protect it against misuse for commercial purposes, have been analysed in a series of articles. Many instances are given also of proposed or existing national laws to provide that protection in the countries concerned. The need to disseminate knowledge of the Geneva Conventions is clearly brought out in the articles on this question, which is as urgent as it is important. To inculcate upon people, even in their childhood, the basic principles underlying these Conventions is to work for the reorientation of education towards humanitarian ideals.

In Red Cross history, the Junior Red Cross is a chapter unto itself. Its foundation, extension, activities and its ups and downs are related in the Review. It is to be hoped that, in view of the present-day restlessness of youth, it will be given even greater coverage henceforth.

The Review deals very fully with the history of assistance to the wounded and the treatment of prisoners of war in past centuries, as well as with the birth of the Red Cross and the development of international law as a precursor of the rules contained in the first Geneva Convention. Readers may find therein some admirable passages from J.-J. Rousseau, the father of modern humanism, on the imperious need to see in the disarmed or wounded enemy no more and no less than a fellow human being.

The memory of outstanding people in the history of the Red Cross—Henry Dunant, Gustave Moynier, Louis Appia, Gustave Ador and Max Huber—was frequently recalled, opportunities for doing so having been provided by various centenary celebrations. Many pages have also been devoted to great names in humanitarian

action such as Florence Nightingale, the Empresses Shôken and Augusta, the Grand Duchess Louise of Baden, Anna Nery, Josephine Butler, Fridtjof Nansen, Elsa Brandström, Albert Schweitzer and others.

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It is only to be expected that the Review during its fifty years has undergone several "face-lifting" operations to meet the needs of the hour and the ideas of new editors. Its presentation was changed at the beginning of the Second World War when priority was given to the activities of the International Committee and its delegates. Later, towards 1955, it was adapted to the requirements of a more modern, more vivid, communications media. Other changes introduced from time to time included new sections such as "Notes and Documents" (since become "Miscellaneous") and such chronicals as "A Delegate's Account".

Bibliographical notes and summary records of meetings have often been included in the Review, informing readers on contemporary thought relative to service in spirit and action, or on progress in medical science contributing to the development of knowledge in the field of health.

The supplements in English, Spanish and German, and later the complete English version, demonstrate the importance of the Review as a link between the distant parts of the Red Cross world, between its various organizations and the official circles of countries signatories to the Geneva Conventions, and between National Societies and the international institutions.

A link, a reflection of human suffering and of constantly shifting reality, the *International Review of the Red Cross* is at the same time a valuable witness to events of our time.

V. SEGESVARY