

## BOOKS AND REVIEWS

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### " BIRTHRIGHT OF MAN " <sup>1</sup>

Jeanne Hersch, a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Geneva and a former director of UNESCO's Division of Philosophy conceived and compiled this book which is no doubt the first ever which presents in such detail and scope man's constant aspiration to be truly a man. This is a valuable work of reference containing more than 1,100 texts or quotations from many civilisations and from every period since three thousand years B.C.: extracts from fable, tragedy, legislation, proverbs, political essays, sermons, epitaphs, poems and songs from five continents. This aspiration for essential human rights has lost nothing of its force; it continually gathers strength throughout the centuries, vibrating; both guide and need to advancing humanity. And the Universal Declaration of Human Rights plays a direct educational role by laying the foundations of a universal citizenship. It plays an indirect role by providing the inspiration for national and international legislation in which the principles it proclaims are translated into definite rules to which the oppressed may turn for protection from abuse.

It must however be pointed out that humanitarian texts had been accepted by the international community before the Universal Declaration and their object too was to ensure respect for those who suffered, whoever they might be; for the humble victims of war, the wounded, the sick, the prisoner. Those texts are the Geneva Conventions: and the efforts of the Red Cross are represented in this book we now review by the ten articles on the first Convention which were at the origin of the great movement of which the Geneva Conventions signed in 1949 are the widest expression today.

Similarly, Henry Dunant is mentioned with an appropriate extract from *A Memory of Solferino*. We can only regret that there are no quotations given from the writings on the Red Cross by that great humanitarian Max Huber who argued that the right to be a man must be unceasingly defended in an increasingly oppressive society and that the Red Cross was defending that right in all

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<sup>1</sup> Unesco Publications Center, 317, East 34 Str., New York 10.016, 1969.

circumstances by intervening in the name of humanity. Let us not forget that non-governmental organizations also efficiently carry out a mission of civic education.

This collection of texts centres around the following themes: Man; Woman; Limitations on Power; Civil Liberty; Truth and Freedom; Social Rights; Freedom in Practice; Education; Science; Culture; Servitude and Violence; Law against Force; National Identity and Independence; Universality; Sources and Ends.

The quotations differ from each other considerably, for the significance of human dignity does not make itself manifest in the same manner in all cultures. But a certain unity appears which has nothing to do with that engendered by scientific and technological conquest; it is unity of a more fundamental type. It is not merely the unity of suffering or that which is born of the repetition in all latitudes of victims' laments, but a unity of a dialogue which humanity enters into with itself and of courage which it draws from increasing solidarity which resonates like hope.

As one quotation from Tamil says: "Every country is mine, every man is my brother", to which a Turkish proverb of the XVth century replies: "One nation is no different from another except in manners and customs".

A certain image of one's neighbour also comes to light everywhere. My neighbour has the same qualities as myself and I must recognize them in him as he respects them in me. As an African Zerma-Sonrai proverb says: "The right of others is like a glowing ember; if you seize it you will burn your hand".

The very number of the quotations and the irrepressible affirmation which stands out is a lesson of confidence to those disconcerted by the world's development. For they believed in the early advent of an age in which, going beyond the stage of principles, the rights of man would be integrated into the positive law of nations and sanctioned by appropriate judicial process. This stage may seem further off than the men of the last century imagined. And yet, in spite of everything, this quest for dignity and justice is too strong, too anchored in millennia to allow of any doubt but that it will one day lead to a better, peaceful, world for which the Red Cross is praying.

*J.G.L.*