

## THE HIDDEN STORY OF THE RED CROSS

### *The turbulent beginnings of the Red Cross*

The beginnings of the Red Cross are turbulent indeed, as depicted in Angela Bennett's lively and often mischievous account of the first fifty years of the Red Cross, a book in which she reveals a hitherto unknown portrait of Henry Dunant, Gustave Moynier and the other founders of what was to become the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded and later the ICRC.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Bennett's exuberant imagination, her liking for Henry Dunant and her sometimes biased opinion of his opponents, her ironic view of Moynier, of Geneva society and of Europe's diplomatic and military circles in the late nineteenth century, engulf the reader as if in a tide: all at once he is plunged into the horrors of the battlefield at Solferino, and relives Dunant's act of kindness and the enthusiasm prompted by the publication of *A Memory of Solferino*. Then he follows the first deliberations of the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, which led to the adoption in 1864 of the Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field and to the setting up of the first national relief societies, which soon became very active in the many conflicts raging at the time.

The reader also observes the increasingly important co-ordinating role conferred on the International Committee by successive Conferences of the Red Cross. Finally, he cannot remain indifferent to Dunant's and Moynier's personal destinies, which throw into relief the sharp contrast in the characters of the two men who left such a strong imprint on the early years of the Red Cross. This early period is to some extent the backdrop of the story, narrated in a captivating if not always objective manner.

Although quite an extensive bibliography is listed at the end of the book, a number of quotations unfortunately cannot be traced for lack of detailed references. This is regrettable inasmuch as the book attempts to provide a vivid and simple survey of the main achievements of early international humanitarian law in the following fields: neutrality of the wounded, of non-combatants and of medical and sanitary personnel coming to their aid; extending the scope of the principles set out in the first Geneva Convention to cover naval warfare and include provisions concerning the transport of the wounded and shipwrecked; respect for the red cross emblem—despite frequent misuses from the outset; the absolute necessity of ensuring that the first Convention was known and respected by the signatory States and their armed

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<sup>2</sup> Bennett, Angela, *L'histoire cachée de la Croix-Rouge. Les débuts mouvementés de la Croix-Rouge*, Ed. Favre S.A., Lausanne, 1989, 223 pp. The author is a journalist and copywriter who began her career in London before moving to Switzerland. She became interested in the Red Cross when she was invited to assist in the English translation of the first volume of the history of the ICRC, *From Solferino to Tsushima*, published by the Henry Dunant Institute in 1985.

forces; first aid given by a hostile Power to soldiers wounded or detained by it.

The book is aimed at a wide audience—especially young people—wishing to discover in an attractive if not always exhaustive manner the origin and principles of what is today known as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

*Brigitte Lacroix*

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### RISING FROM THE ASHES<sup>3</sup>

#### *Development Strategies in Times of Disaster*

Basing their analysis on the premise that non-governmental organizations' goodwill alone is not enough to provide adequate assistance to people stricken by disaster and that "imposed" aid can have negative long-term effects, the authors of this book reflect on how best to avoid the pitfalls of relief work in emergency situations.

The authors present eleven case studies taken from different contexts (Ethiopia, Colombia, Philippines, Thailand, etc.), arguing that the affected population should participate in relief operations so as to lay the foundation for reconstruction and development. In high-risk areas where many disasters occur development may be essentially defined as the process by which vulnerabilities are reduced; it should be seen as the ability to prevent or overcome a disaster, both by individuals and at the regional or national level.

This book also aims to help narrow the gap between generally accepted principles (such as the principle that all emergency aid must further development), implementation policies and the actual practice of NGOs, which provides numerous examples of inadequacy and amateurism.

*Jean-Luc Blondel*

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<sup>3</sup> Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising from the Ashes. Development Strategies in Times of Disaster*, Westview Press, Boulder & San Francisco, UNESCO, Paris, 1989, 338 pp.