

**An Edict of Cyrus Foreshadows
the Declaration of Human Rights**

Festivities will be held at Persepolis in October to celebrate 2,500 years of Iran's empire since its foundation by Cyrus the Great. And the symbol of that commemoration is an edict which may be regarded as a prefiguration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. Although the edict was limited to only one country, it bore witness to a new spirit and to a generous attitude towards the inhabitants of a conquered country.

The *International Review* has already published several studies on the emergence and the gradual affirmation of the humanitarian ideal through the ages. Thus it has printed articles on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and other religions or civilizations. A few years ago, it published a study by Dr. Abbas Naficy, Vice-President and Secretary-General of the Iranian Red Lion and Sun Society, on the origins of humanitarian feelings in ancient Iran, and this is what the author wrote about Cyrus the Great: ¹

“ We have recalled the religious atmosphere of ancient Iran to show that the great Achaemenid kings—Cyrus, Cambyses and Darius—proclaimed for all to hear that they were the servants of the God of good and light. They looked upon themselves, so to speak, as missionaries of a moral and religious revolution, and set themselves the task of carrying through the world a new conception of enlightened imperialism, characterized by moral and humanitarian ideas and spiritual in its essence. They ordered their subjects and their armies to wage war with moderation and to treat those

¹ *International Review*, English supplement, August 1957.

whom they conquered gently and benevolently. They were proud to proclaim in their indestructible inscriptions their good deeds and their struggle against evil, lies, injustice and perfidy. Finally, they preached moral precepts and love of one's neighbour.

Among the Achaemenid kings it is above all to Cyrus that the honour falls of having waged war with clemency and humanity. This great monarch, who is "indisputably one of the greatest figures in history"¹, had for the first time the brilliant idea of organizing and unifying the world and ensuring that not only order, prosperity and peace—the peace of the Great King—but civil liberty and justice prevailed upon the earth. The Greek historians Xenophon and Herodotus have drawn a striking picture of Cyrus. They admired him above all for having been always "good to his friends, tolerant towards the vanquished, certain of their confidence, and for having abided by treaties and promises". (Xenophon) And again, "the Persians gave him the title of Father and would never have dared to compare anyone with this great prince". (Herodotus)

Cyrus ordered his subjects to treat the wounded of the enemy army with the same care as those in his own army and to give them the same attention. This idea—an idea of genius at that time—is perhaps the most ancient evidence of the Red Cross idea and it marked the beginning of human respect, charity, kindness and pity, which until then had been unknown in wartime. This sovereign, "full of wisdom and goodness, decked with all the virtues", appeared to the Jews as the messenger of Jehovah and to the Greeks as "an ideal figure", almost "a legendary character".

What Dr. Naficy wrote in this article was strikingly shown in the edict promulgated by Cyrus after the fall of Babylon, in 538 B.C. On an earthenware cylinder discovered on the site of Babylon, the text was engraved in cuneiform characters, and we are happy to give below a few lines embodying the substance of the edict:

¹ C. Huart: *L'Iran antique et la civilisation iraniennne* (L'Evolution de l'humanité), Paris, page 51.

My great army has conquered Babylon. I have given orders that my soldiers shall not harm the inhabitants of this country, who shall live in freedom and shall have the right to practise whatever religion they please. I have demanded that no house shall be destroyed, that no heart shall be wounded, that all shall be free to choose their gods. May the Almighty be pleased with me, Cyrus, king of kings. I have given orders that the peoples whose countries have been conquered by my army shall be free, entirely free.

TWENTIETH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF MILITARY MEDICINE AND PHARMACY

The Congress was held in Brussels from 27 June to 2 July 1971, under the chairmanship of General Dr. E. Evrard. Sixty-four countries were represented. It marked the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the International Committee of Military Medicine and Pharmacy (ICMMP). In 1921, the first meeting was held which gave birth to the Standing Committee, the first step towards a medical council whereby army doctors proposed to set up, across frontiers and without regard for any possible national antagonism, confident links of friendship, mutual esteem and cordial solidarity.

Dr. R. Marti congratulated the Congress on behalf of the ICRC and wished it success. Recalling the close relations and unfailing co-operation existing between the ICMMP and the ICRC, he associated himself with the tributes paid to the late Colonel Hans Meuli, a former member of the ICRC and doyen of the ICMMP, and to General Dr. Voncken, Secretary-General of the ICMMP and its guiding spirit for several decades.

At the closing meeting, Dr. Marti said that the ICMMP's ever growing vitality over the past half century was reflected in an