

A Red Cross reminiscence

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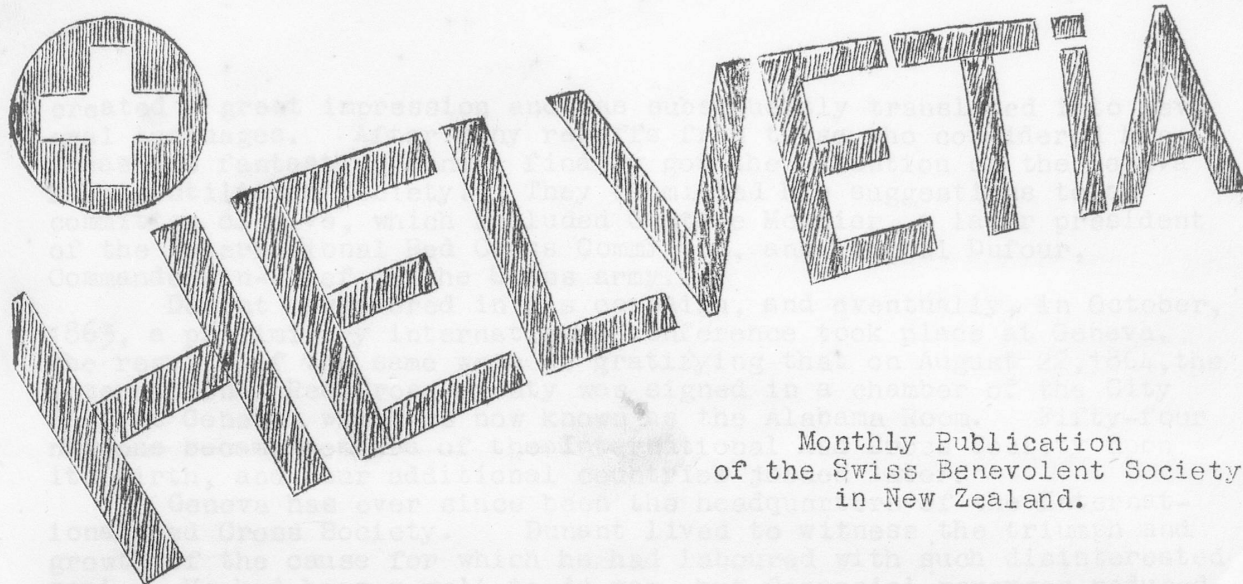
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New Year's Day is the opportune day for contemplation. Thinking back, we benefit, for we may realise our weaknesses and committed mistakes. Realising them, gives us the possibility and the strength of avoiding them in future. Looking ahead, gives us hope for the fulfilment of our expectations, realization of our plans for life, achievement of the task towards ourselves, our families and our friends.

Swiss in New Zealand, let us hope that the New Year will bring to all, health and happiness. We extend to you, our very best wishes for a successful year.

A RED CROSS REMINISCENCE.

Of all noble institutions established for the benefit of suffering humanity, the Red Cross undoubtedly occupies the most exalted rank. Today the very knowledge of its existence has a reassuring effect all over the world, and wherever calamity visits a people it is to the Red Cross to whom they look as their administering angel.

A Red Cross on a white field is the universal insignia of this great humanitarian organization which was born in Switzerland. Thus, the Red Cross flag pays in a reversed arrangement everlasting tribute to the land of its origin.

The actual founder of the Red Cross Society is Jean Henri Dunant, member of a distinguished and pious family of Geneva. On June 14, 1859, he chanced to be present at the battle of Solferino, where the allied forces of the French and Piedmontese met and overthrew the armies of Austria. Horrible conditions prevailed on that battle-field, and Dunant, filled with pity for the thousands of wounded soldiers, resolved that only speedy action could save their lives. Quickly he secured a number of women from the neighbourhood, and with their aid improvised additional ambulance service to the village of Castiglione. Here he rendered personal assistance to the stricken men, who soon began to name him the "Gentleman in White", in allusion to his attire.

The harrowing scenes which he had witnessed left an indelible impression on Dunant's mind, and he conceived the idea of promoting a volunteer corps, drilled and instructed in the handling of stretchers, permanently organized and protected in its work on the battlefield by its absolute neutrality. One of his first acts after returning to Geneva was to write and publish a book "Souvenir of Solferino", in which he described his experiences. The volume

created a great impression and was subsequently translated into several languages. After many rebuffs from those who considered his ideas too fantastic, Dunant finally got the attention of the Geneva Public Utilities Society. They submitted his suggestions to a committee of five, which included Gustave Moynier, a later president of the International Red Cross Committee, and General Dufour, Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss army.

Dunant persevered in his campaign, and eventually, in October, 1863, a preliminary international conference took place at Geneva. The results of the same were so gratifying that on August 22, 1864, the International Red Cross treaty was signed in a chamber of the City Hall at Geneva, which is now known as the Alabama Room. Fifty-four nations became members of the International Red Cross Society upon its birth, and four additional countries joined later.

Geneva has ever since been the headquarters of the International Red Cross Society. Dunant lived to witness the triumph and growth of the cause for which he had laboured with such disinterested zeal. He had been a well-to-do man, but financial reverses reduced him for some considerable time to a stage of poverty. However, in 1901, he was given the Nobel peace prize, and the subsequent material relief and world recognition it brought to him made his old age brighter. He died in 1910 at the age of 82, at Heiden, canton of Appenzell. On his hundredth birthday anniversary in 1928 the Swiss Red Cross made a collection for a memorial worthy of the great humanitarian and this monument was unveiled in 1931 at Zurich, Dunant's last resting place.

SWISS VOLUNTARY LABOUR SERVICE.

This year the receipts of the annual Swiss Independence Day collections on August 1st, were set aside in favour of the Voluntary Labour Service. Switzerland at present has about 110,000 unemployed in Winter and 50,000 in Summer. Almost a fifth of these idle are persons under 24 years of age, for whose morale work is far more essential than mere financial relief.

For the benefit of these young unemployed, of 16 to 24 years of age, the Swiss Government has established a Voluntary Labour Service. This service emphasizes the ethical value of work, and is arranged in such a manner that the youthful unemployed are fortified in their desire to work. Whenever possible, an opportunity is given to them to retain their skill in their profession or trade. The duration of individual service is seldom permitted to exceed three months at a time and six months altogether per year.

Participants in the Voluntary Labour Service receive free board and room, a small amount of pocket money, and their travelling expenses. They are insured against accident and illness, and their working clothes and shoes are loaned to them. The service for men includes road construction, archaeological excavations, building of hostels for youth, also vocational work, while some units teach the arts of good housekeeping to the girls.

After a young person has done eight weeks voluntary service, he or she is given an official certificate to this effect, and employment agencies, as well as employers, have already come to regard such a document as a special recommendation for willingness to work on the part of its holder.

MEMBERS : Contribute articles and news of general
 interest to this publication.
