

The work of the International Committee of "The Red Cross" during the Second World War : concerning a local committee for aid to the wounded

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SWITZERLAND A HAVEN.

Switzerland, whose children mirror the healthy, prosperous condition of their country, has taken on heavy burdens in helping the children of her less fortunate neighbors.

Last Winter 1,000,000 children in seven countries received one meal a day from Don Suisse, an agency that has official and private financial support. This Winter, Don Suisse will pool much of its activity with the United Nations Children's Fund.

With a population of slightly more than 4,300,000 Switzerland in this activity alone, contributed to Europe's children more than 7/6d per head (total almost £2,000,000). The equivalent contributed in New Zealand would be over £650,000.

Even more characteristically, the Swiss contribution is in taking children directly into Swiss homes. Individual Swiss, at their own expense, have cared for more than 135,000 children for periods averaging three months during the war and post-war years. Since 1933 more than 5,000 refugee children have been received unconditionally into Switzerland. Four hundred children from the Buchenwald concentration camp are still here, awaiting permission to enter Palestine.

A more permanent rehabilitation job is being done in a child city named after the famous Swiss educator Pestalozzi. While only a few can be taken, those lucky enough to be chosen are educated, trained and allowed to stay in Switzerland or return to their homes when conditions warrant, as normal, healthy citizens. There also are two Pestalozzi villages in Greece and one in Poland. (The New York Times).

THE WORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF
"THE RED CROSS,"
DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

CONCERNING A LOCAL COMMITTEE FOR AID TO THE WOUNDED.....(CHAPTER 11).

The Red Cross was born. It had two parts, separate but complementary, corresponding to Dunant's two suggestions: an international Convention, and Committees for aid to the wounded. The purpose assigned to the Committee of Five being thus achieved, was this organism to be dissolved, or at best to restrict its activity to that of a local committee for aid to wounded soldiers, that is to say, in a neutral country like Switzerland, to almost nothing? No; the 1863 Conference had considered it the originator of the idea, and now it was to remain its guardian.

A principle "embodied in a Convention and accepted as sacred," the Red Cross was international. On the other hand, the Aid Societies, which were later to become the Red Cross Societies, had been conceived and created on the national plane only. They were independent of each other; no treaty stipulation united them in a legally constituted body. That did not come about until after the first World War. Nevertheless, the similarity of their aims and principles made them into a kind of family.

This relationship gave rise to exchanges, for which the Geneva Committee was the natural medium. As early as the first International Red Cross Conference the Committee received a mandate, which was to be several times renewed, to maintain and develop the relations between the National Societies; and to the Committee were entrusted commissions arising from common interests and tendencies; the recognition of the National Societies, the publication of an international bulletin, the preparation of conferences, plans for international conventions, and many others. This rôle, assigned from the beginning

to the Geneva Committee, explains the title of "International Committee" which it was later to assume, although it remained, by its status and its composition - purely national, even local, for the first fifty years.

From 1866 onwards, successive wars gave several of the National Societies the opportunity to prove their usefulness. As for the International Committee, which, at the time of the Prusso-Danish conflict of 1864, had already sent delegates to the belligerents, it repeated these missions, which were useful in gaining experience that would be of the greatest value for the improvement of the Conventions or the Red Cross Societies.

But the Committee did not stop at that. In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian war, it opened at Basle an "Information and Relief Agency for the Wounded and Sick." This Agency enlisted people of goodwill, organized them, and sent to the battlefield doctors, nurses, medical equipment and supplies. Its delegates visited the hospitals, issued relief and gave comfort and information.

The giving of information, the restoration of the link between the wounded soldier, lost in a field-hospital and his family - that too was a task for the intermediary that the Committee wished to become. "Oh! sir, if you could write to my father, so that he could comfort my mother!" a dying soldier had said to Dunant. Dunant had written, and other helpers too; but for them, many families would never have known anything of the fate of their missing. The International Committee had remembered this.

Then a worker for the International Red Cross, Dr. Christ-Socin - a name to remember - had the idea of opening, alongside the Agency and in the same spirit, an information bureau for prisoners of war. The Committee approved of this private venture and took it over, without, however, granting the use of the sign of the Red Cross, still reserved for the wounded and sick.

In 1877, during the Russo-Turkish conflict, the Committee founded the Trieste Agency, for the help of the wounded and sick only, and in 1912, at the time of the Balkan wars, the Belgrade Agency, for prisoners of war as well as for the wounded and sick.

But those were occasional activities. In the meantime the International Committee devoted itself to its permanent peace-time task, the carrying out of its mandates. The spread of the Red Cross idea, and the formation of National Societies throughout the world, increased its work as connecting link and international centre. The experience gained during wars gave it material for study. At the instance of the Red Cross, the "principle embodied in a Convention and accepted as sacred" was re-examined, improved, extended. First, at the Hague Conference of 1899, the principles of the 1864 Convention were adapted to naval warfare. Then, in 1906, the new Geneva Convention replaced that of 1864, now felt to be too brief. This time the basic idea of the Red Cross, outlined in the original text, was given full prominence, being clearly set forth in the first Article, "Officers and soldiers and other persons officially attached to the armed forces who are wounded and sick shall be respected and cared for without distinction of nationality, by the belligerent in whose power they may be." The Convention further ordained measures to ensure this respect and care; it confirmed the protection due to medical staff and establishments and defined their status. It regulated the use of the protecting symbol. Finally, and this is to be noted, it put on the same footing as the protected medical staff, the staff of the voluntary aid societies, duly recognized and authorized by their Governments, that is to say, first and foremost, though they were not named, the National Red Cross Societies.

In its turn, this Convention was adapted, by the Hague Convention of 1907, to naval warfare. There followed the Hague Regulations of 1907 concerning the laws and customs of war on land. A whole section was devoted to prisoners of war. This, in the development of the law of nations, was a step forward which freed prisoners of war from the arbitrary treatment to which they had hitherto been subjected. "Prisoners of War" said Article 4 "are in the power of the hostile Government, but not of the individuals or corps who capture them. They must be humanely treated." Disarmed, the prisoner of war was no longer

at the mercy of his captor; he had a legal status. Although his condition as military captive restricted his liberty and gave him obligations towards the enemy, the latter also had obligations towards him.

Two provisions specially concerned the Red Cross, that contained in Article 14, instituting an official information bureau in each State, and that contained in Article 15, permitting societies for aid to prisoners of war to pursue their work of mercy - within the bounds set by military necessity.

Then a new chapter began in the history of the Red Cross. Actually no new element appeared, but there was a widening, a transference of the principle already accepted. For what is the principle of the Red Cross, if not this: a combatant who is sick or wounded, and therefore harmless, is no longer a soldier but only a human being. What matters now is not his nationality, but only his suffering. And what is a prisoner of war if not, in his way, a sick or wounded man? As soon as the measures are taken which make it impossible for him to do any harm, he is a man, and nothing more.

It will be understood why, after the declaration of war in 1914, the International Committee of the Red Cross devoted itself almost entirely to this new category of victims, the prisoners. Always anxious, in the event of conflict, to take part in relief work according to its position and its resources, what better could it do? For the wounded and sick, the National Societies, developed, organized, prepared for their tasks, were at their posts; but they were less in a position to help prisoners of war by serving as intermediary between them and the enemy country. The International Committee of the Red Cross, although not perhaps the only body able to undertake such work, was the best prepared for it because of its former work at Basle and Trieste, which gave it experience and the trust of the belligerents. In any case it was the first to undertake it. The attempt was an unprecedented success. Three months after the opening of the Geneva Agency, the twenty or so workers who had answered President Ador's appeal had become many hundreds. An entire museum building was needed to house them and their files. Moreover, they had to deal with a mail amounting to eighteen thousand items a day in all languages and at the end of the war, they had made out and used seven million index-cards.

Nor was this all. The International Committee of the Red Cross remained involved until 1923 in various undertakings which might be called war activities: the repatriation of prisoners of war taken on the Eastern front, many scattered to the furthest corners of Siberia and international relief work undertaken during the great famines and epidemics in Central and Eastern Europe.

After this, the International Committee of the Red Cross resumed its peace-time activities: the preparation of international conferences, legal and technical research, help in time of calamity, plans for the modification of the existing conventions or for new treaties in the light of the experience gained in the World War.

To a large extent this was preparation for war, which means that it was almost blasphemous at the time. Optimism was the order of the day. Had not the last War ended war? Would not the League of Nations and the great international bodies stifle at its birth anything which might cause a fresh conflagration? The Red Cross itself followed the general tendency; henceforward National Societies would be able to give their main energies to peaceful activities, such as the fight against illness and pain, the development of hygiene, the organization of help in case of natural disasters. Following the example of the nations, and with the purpose of practical co-operation in peace time, of mutual assistance and united activity, they formed themselves into an association, the "League of Red Cross Societies."

The League, the representative organ of the National Societies, was a permanent central body, for intercommunication, co-ordination and research. It aimed at promoting the formation and development of a National Red Cross Society in every country. Just as the International Committee co-operated with the National Societies with a view to perfecting the work done by the Red Cross for war victims, the League which, although it had independent legal status, was

also their common instrument, co-operated with these Societies with a view to improving health, preventing illness and alleviating physical suffering.

DIE INKRAFTSETZUNG DER ALTERSUND HINTERLASSENENVERSICHERUNG FÜR DIE AUSLANDSCHWEIZER.

Nachdem in einer Eidgenössischen Volksabstimmung vom 6. Juli d. J. das Bundesgesetz über die Alters- und Hinterlassenen-Versicherung zur Annahme gelangt war, sind in Zusammenarbeit mit Vertretern aller Volkskreise die Ausführungsbestimmungen ausgearbeitet und der Text der Vollzugsverordnung, der nicht weniger als 219 Artikel umfasst, ist nunmehr bekanntgegeben worden.

Das Gesetz unterscheidet zwei Kategorien: Die obligatorisch und die freiwillig Versicherten.

Zu den obligatorisch versicherten Auslandschweizern gehören jene Schweizerbürger, die im Ausland für einen Arbeitgeber in der Schweiz tätig sind und von diesem entlohnt werden (so auch die Mitglieder der schweizerischen diplomatischen und konsularischen Vertretungen in Ausland).

Da grundsätzlich alle natürlichen Personen, die in der Schweiz ihren zivilrechtlichen Wohnsitz haben sowie alle natürlichen Personen, die in der Schweiz eine Erwerbstätigkeit ausüben, also auch Ausländer, obligatorisch von der Versicherung erfasst werden, mussten vom Gesetz für Personen, die sich in bestimmten Eigenschaften in der Schweiz aufhalten oder die die genannten Voraussetzungen nur für eine verhältnismässig kurze Zeit erfüllen, gewisse Ausnahmen vorgesehen werden. Die Vollzugsverordnung führt diese Ausnahmen im einzelnen auf, d. h., sie nimmt gewisse Kategorien von der obligatorischen Versicherung aus, so in erster Linie Ausländer mit diplomatischen Vorrechten (diplomatische und konsularische Vertretungen internationale Institutionen mit Sitz in der Schweiz usw.) ferner Ausländer, Staatenlose und Auslandschweizer, welche 1. sich ausschliesslich zu Besuchs-, Kur-, Ferien-, Studien- oder sonstigen Ausbildungszwecken in der Schweiz aufhalten, sofern sie in der Schweiz keine Erwerbstätigkeit ausüben und keinen Wohnsitz gründen; 2. in der Schweiz während längstens drei aufeinanderfolgenden Monaten eine Erwerbstätigkeit ausüben, sofern sie von einem Arbeitgeber im Ausland entlohnt werden, wie Reisende und Techniker ausländischer Firmen, oder wenn sie lediglich bestimmte Aufträge auszuführen bzw. Verpflichtungen zu erfüllen haben, wie Künstler, Artisten und Experten; 3. in der Schweiz während insgesamt höchstens sechs Monaten im Kalenderjahr selbständig erwerbstätig sind (Marktfahrer, Artisten und deren ausländische Arbeitnehmer); 4. zur Verrichtung bestimmter, saisonbedingter Arbeiten in die Schweiz einreisen und sich hier höchstens drei Wochen im Jahr aufhalten. In diese Kategorie gehören auch Ausländer und Staatenlose, die in der Schweiz nur vorübergehend der Asylgewährung teilhaftig sind und keine Erwerbstätigkeit in der Schweiz ausüben. Für Grenzgänger mit unregelmässiger Erwerbstätigkeit sowie das auf schweizerischen Schiffen tätige ausländische Personal kann das Eidgenössische Volkswirtschaftsdepartement besondere Vorschriften erlassen.

Auslandschweizer, die in der oben aufgeführten Kategorie der obligatorisch Versicherten nicht angehören, können sich laut Gesetz freiwillig versichern lassen, wenn sie das 20. Altersjahr vollendet und das 30. Altersjahr noch nicht zurückgelegt haben. Um beim Inkrafttreten des Gesetzes in demokratischer Weise allen Schweizerbürgern die gleichen Rechte zu gewähren, ist vom Gesetz, die Ausnahmebestimmung gemacht worden, dass zum Zeitpunkt, wo das Gesetz in Kraft tritt, auch jene Auslandschweizer der Versicherung beitreten können, die in diesem Augenblick wohl das 30. Altersjahr, jedoch nicht das 65. Altersjahr zurückgelegt haben.

(Wegen Raummangel Fortsetzung in der nächsten Nummer).