# A UNIQUE ORGANIZATION, INDEPENDENT AND UNITED:

# THE RED CROSS

*We have pleasure in publishing the text of the lecture which Mr. F. Siordet, member of the ICRC and President of the Centenary Commission of the Red Cross in Switzerland, gave in August 1963 at the University of Geneva. During the next few months two further talks will appear, one by Mrs. S. Gabru, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Governors of the League, and a member of the Ethiopian Red Cross, and the other by Mrs. G. Pecson, Chairman of the Philippine Red Cross—relating to the Red Cross, its tasks and principles. One should here briefly recall in what circumstances these lectures took place.*

*Certain events organized in Geneva on the occasion of the Centenary were not only meant for members of the Red Cross. There were, for example, a series of lectures by which the organizers wanted the general public to have a fairly extensive view of the principal aspects of the Red Cross in the world today. It was arranged that each of these would be followed by a discussion in which the audience could take part by asking the lecturer questions on the subjects concerned and in general on the Red Cross. These discussions enabled certain problems of topical importance to be brought up and also often to be defined.*

*In this connection we would mention the following in particular: the rôle of the ICRC in the Cuban crisis, the possibilities of the International Committee participating in the control of a disarmament agreement, the extension of Red Cross tasks in countries in the process of development, the origin of the red cross emblem, the observation of the Geneva Conventions by the United Nations Forces, the work of the Red Cross for a mutual understanding between peoples, and finally, the*

*rapprochement between East and West and the rôle which the ICRC might be able to play therein.*

*These events aroused the public's interest on account especially of those personalities who accepted to take an active part in them. We are not only thinking here of the lecturers themselves, amongst whom we would also mention Mr. Jacques Pirenne of the Belgian Royal Academy, but in addition, of the presence of the Chairman of the Standing Commission of the ICRC and the League and of the President of the Swiss Red Cross, each of whom took the chair at one of the meetings. One should also mention Professors B. Gagnebin and O. Reverdin, of the University of Geneva, who led some of the discussions.*

*Finally, we would recall that there were present amongst the lecturers, two leading female personalities, one from Africa and one from Asia. Such a choice clearly demonstrated the universal character of our movement in which, furthermore, the female contribution plays such a valuable part. They had come to testify what the Red Cross meant to them. As the President of the Swiss Red Cross declared on introducing the first lecturer : " Indeed, Madame Gabru—and this appears to me to be something wonderful and unique this evening—has not come from such a distance to speak to us of her experiences as Vice-President of an African Red Cross Society. She has come to talk of something great, the Red Cross, which was created some five hundred yards from this very spot, which belongs to her as much as to us, of a benefit common to all peoples and to all those especially who, like herself, have known the suffering of others and have alleviated it ".*

*How has this work, which has become common to all humanity, developed, then been diversified in a number of institutions, in the interest itself of the effectiveness of its action ? This is what Mr. Siordet will now explain.* (Edit.)

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Many involved relationships exist between the action and the institution, which have certain similarities between thought and language. A people's own form of thinking in fact often influences its vocabulary and conversely the latter exercises some influence on thought itself. In the same way action demands a certain form of organization and this, once established, canalises activities or even inspires them, if it does not even create them. To such general rules the Red Cross is no exception.

No one could pretend that the Red Cross has a simple, uncomplicated structure. This is indeed far from being the case. There are many who find difficulty in making distinctions between its various bodies and who are apt to lose themselves in the maze of these National Societies, the International Committee and of the League of Red Cross Societies. At first sight all this appears to be somewhat complex. However, none of these bodies started by chance : each one of them in fact fulfils a very definite and concrete necessity. How could one explain them better than by returning to their origins to find the needs which gave them birth.

Have no fear ! I do not propose to give you minute details of the origins of the Red Cross. These have been fully presented to you over the past few months by the press, radio and television. It is only necessary therefore to recall certain essential facts, or more precisely, several periods in its history : the beginnings, the creation of the National Societies ; the period from 1870 to 1890 during which the ICRC's rôle was slowly being defined, its relations with the whole, then 1919 and the founding of the League.

At the origin of it all was the observation made by Dunant on the day after the battle of Solferino of the utter abandonment in which the battle-wounded were left. This shocking and monstrous indifference, the appalling condition of the wounded, were described in vivid terms by Dunant in the book which you all know, *A Memory of Solferino*. This is a true book. General Trochu made a point of emphasizing : " All that has been said by Mr. Dunant is perfectly exact, if anything, he understates the facts ". Marshal Canrobert, whom Dunant met shortly afterwards, expressed himself in similar terms : " All you have said is only too true ".

It is hardly worth saying that Dunant was not the only one to make the same observations, many others had made them before him or at the same time. They did not however all draw the same conclusions. Whilst all agreed that an end should be made to this excessive suffering of the wounded, they did not all propose the same remedies.

Many of them suggested the certainly radical solution that war itself should cease. When the Red Cross was founded they heaped the strongest reproaches upon it. Indeed they accused it of coming to terms with war, of accepting it, even of smoothing its path.

They considered, not without a certain cynicism, that the Red Cross rendered a very bad service to humanity. They would

have preferred war to be left with all its attendant horror so that everyone might feel the necessity all the more in order to fight against it. That was the first remedy proposed to put an end to the suffering of the victims of war.

Florence Nightingale, who during the Crimean War, had found herself face to face with scenes identical with those described by Dunant, had another point of view. When he appealed to private charity she raised somewhat violent objections to such an idea. " Voluntary Societies ", she wrote, " would then take upon themselves the duties which in fact are incumbent on the governments of each country. To wish to remove a responsibility which is really theirs and which only they can assume, would have the effect of giving them more chances of embarking on a new war ".

The lack of training, the amateurism of the women volunteers who had accompanied her had convinced her that these were fit for nothing except to hinder the official services. Hence her idea, which she had her own country accept, of making a complete reorganization of the medical services for them to reach the requisite strength to meet demands. The same opinion was vehemently expressed, it must be admitted with much logic, after the Italian war by the illustrious and much respected Dr. Palasciano who was working in military hospitals at the same time as Dunant. Indignant at seeing these fine soldiers risking amputation after being wounded for economy's sake, or their waiting upon public charity for aid to which they had an undoubted right, he continued : " I cannot admit that whilst the law forbids a ship-owner from allowing his vessel to make a long-distance voyage without carrying doctors and medicines, it permits States to wage war without having sufficient personnel to care for the sick and wounded on a regular basis and without having taken every possible step to prevent their chances of being mutilated ".

Florence Nightingale, Palasciano and all those expressing their views to the same effect were certainly not in the wrong and history has in fact proved them to have been right to a certain extent. The medical services of the small-sized armies during the first part of the XIXth Century, gradually improved their methods. Since then, they have considerably expanded and today in quite a number of armies one could dispense with the Red Cross and its voluntary auxiliaries. This moreover is not the least progress due precisely to the creation of the Red Cross and the Geneva Convention.

But could one, at that time, expect the medical services to carry out their reforms ? Undoubtedly not. For nearly all the armies in the world thought along the same lines as the spokesman for the Prussian General Staff : " One could not agree with the principles of a wise State economy, if one were to give, in time of peace, in a continuous manner to the Army Medical Service the amount of attention and make the improvements it asks for with regard to all the requirements of war."

This is precisely the conclusion which Dunant reached as a result of his experiences of things military. He was a man of peace. Solferino had filled him with a horror of war. He knew, however, that the way to peace would be long and arduous : " Since the hopes and aspirations of the Society of the Friends of Peace must be abandoned, like the dreams of the abbé de St. Pierre and the noble aspirations of such men as the Count de Sellon . . . " he wrote, and :

" Since new and terrible methods of destruction are invented daily, with perseverance worthy of a better object, and since the inventors of these instruments of destruction are applauded and encouraged in most of the great European States, which are engaged in an armament race ;

And since finally the state of mind of Europe combines with many other symptoms to indicate the prospect of future wars, the avoidance of which, sooner or later, seems hardly possible . . . why could not advantage be taken of a time of relative calm and quiet to investigate and try to solve a question of such immense and world-wide importance ? . . . "

Dunant was well aware that the medical services would continue to be inadequate for their task for a long time to come. He did not want to resign himself to this. He looked for what people who, like himself, had no power and wielded no authority over the conduct of wars, could start doing at once. His own action had shown him what private charity could do. Like Florence Nightingale, however, he could assess its defects. That is the reason why he suggested that help should certainly be given by volunteers, but they should be *prepared* in advance for their task, and no longer be on an improvised basis. This notion which greatly attracted Gustave Moynier, which was adopted by the Committee of Five and submitted in its turn to the 1863 Conference, was to give birth to the Red Cross. Without waiting any longer, a committee should be established in each country whose duty it would be, in time of

war and if the need arises, to assist the Army Medical Services by every means in its power. " In peacetime, the committees . . . shall take steps to ensure their real usefulness in time of war . . . by seeking to *train* and *instruct* voluntary medical personnel. On the request or with the consent of the military authorities, Committees may send voluntary medical personnel to the battlefield . . . " Such are the very terms of the *Resolutions* adopted by the Conference of 1863 which form the constitutive charter of the Red Cross.

How should these Societies, which will later be known as Red Cross Societies, be organized ?

This is where we enter Gustave Moynier's special sphere ; for, in fact, if Dunant gave the initial impetus, the vital spark to the Red Cross, it was Moynier who was to be its architect.

Moynier was convinced first of all that these aid Societies should be of a *national* character. He had two reasons for thinking this. He considered above all that these Societies should not be cast in the same mould, that they should adapt themselves to the laws of their country, to the temperament and the customs of the population. It was only thus that they could be fully effective and arouse enthusiastic goodwill around them. Moynier, also thought that it was most important for these Societies to be completely independent. In no case should they be or appear to be subject to some supranational authority. These Societies should in fact work in perfect harmony with the country's Health Service. They should also win its confidence. Now, how could they be accepted if the armed forces, with which they were to work, felt that they were in any way answerable to some body outside the country ? Moynier carried his concern so far as to take the view that the International Committee, which had founded these Societies, ought itself to disappear. He wrote many times to that effect, since he maintained that governments should be fully reassured on that particular point.

Amongst its resolutions, the Conference of 1863 had stipulated that the committees of the belligerent nations could request the help of committees belonging to neutral countries.

With the creation of the first aid Societies for the wounded, solidly based on their own countries, one question was raised. Did these possess a community of interest, or not ? In case of war, were the Societies of neutral countries bound to respond to an appeal ? The question was asked, but remained unanswered. This in itself is characteristic of the Red Cross, as it never reaches a

satisfactory solution where abstract questions are concerned. Indeed, only facts dictate its actions and soon facts were to be in evidence.

The war of 1870 between Prussia and France had just broken out. The Prussian Red Cross as well as the French Society were on the spot alongside the medical services of their own armies which had much need moreover of their help. All the other societies in existence then spontaneously collected and despatched an incredible quantity of relief. They did not restrict themselves to merely supplying clothing or bandaging equipment. They formed entire ambulance units and sent personnel which showed itself remarkably efficient to various parts of the front. In no previous war had so much goodwill been seen in support.

The existence of a community of interest between the National Societies was not the only thing to be revealed from the 1870 war. Here was another no less important point in the destinies of the Red Cross, experienced by both the French and Prussian Societies. How did these events take place ?

Let us place ourselves, for example, on the French side. It cares for the wounded fallen on the battlefield, but it knows that the Prussians, during their rapid advance, have collected large numbers of French wounded. These are sent to military or civilian hospitals in the rear. What happens to these wounded ? The French Society does not know, but urgently wishes to show its sympathy, to have parcels sent to them, it would like to obtain news to transmit to their families who are ignorant of whether these men died on the battlefield or have been collected. The Prussian Society also has the same preoccupations. But what is to be done at a time when all communications have been interrupted between the two countries ? It seems that some part of the Red Cross machine is missing. Must a new body be created ? This will not be necessary since there is the International Committee in Geneva, the founder body composed solely of Genevese, and consequently neutral. The Conference of 1863 had in fact foreseen no rôle for it. Moreover, as we have seen, that Committee had thought that once Societies had been formed in most of the European countries and with the signing of the Geneva Convention, its task was accomplished and it should dissolve itself. If it did not do this, it was because the national committees themselves had asked it, having been their promoter, to remain their link. And this is how the International Committee defined that link :

" The rôle in which we have enclosed ourselves until now and which satisfies our ambition is merely that of a central correspondence bureau or office " . . .

By virtue of that resolution, the International Committee had opened an agency in Basle in July 1870, which was the forerunner of the Information Agency which exists in Geneva today. This Agency, which set to work very rapidly, went far beyond the terms and provisions of its mandate. Since it was not just a matter of writing to it (more than a thousand letters received and despatched each day), Societies of neutral countries also sent it large quantities of relief supplies. It was thus in a position to supply the wounded of both sides with relief equivalent to three million francs of that time.

Thus precipitated into action, the Committee was not long in taking numerous initiatives itself. One example amongst many others can be quoted. It knew that in the hospitals of both sides there were many wounded in such a serious condition that they would be unable to fight again. The Committee therefore negotiated with both governments. Having obtained their agreement, it was able to organize convoys, which were to bring the mutilated, the seriously wounded and sick through Swiss territory to their own country. During one such transfer, a seriously wounded Algerian died in the hospital at Geneva. Moynier, always laconic and precise, wrote on that occasion : " I was present, alone, at his burial, wearing my armband." What a splendid thing, that armband, with which the cold man of law makes both a family and a country for this unknown soldier who died on foreign soil !

Here was another initiative taken by the Committee. Prisoners of war becoming more and more numerous were rotting in the camps. In order to lessen their suffering and re-establish the link between them and their country, their families, the Committee set up, parallel with the Basle Agency, a special agency for prisoners of war. However, because of legal scruples, it entrusted responsibility for them to others and placed it under the sign of the green cross, as the red cross still only covered the wounded and sick, and not men fit to bear arms, under the Convention.

It was in this way, therefore, in order to fulfil a need which was felt by the whole of the Red Cross, that this very Committee, which had been destined to disappear, became a cog and a most important one at that, in the machine. But that was not all. The Committee

also understood that it had a rôle to play in time of peace. Since its origin, its primary task has been to work for the extension of the Red Cross, to encourage the creation of new National Societies.

Now, the Conference of 1863 had not determined the conditions which Societies had to fulfil in order to be admitted into the Red Cross family. Some of these were entirely satisfactory, but others were of such a strange character that their proliferation under the Red Cross flag would have constituted a real danger. There were also certain orders claiming to come under the Red Cross, whose main activity was to sell honorary diplomas, at very high prices.

Who was then in a position to put a brake on these abuses ? It certainly could not be done by the National Societies who did not feel themselves within their rights to take action in a neighbouring country. Here again the Committee understood that it had a responsibility to carry out. It therefore decided to submit new Societies to a sort of entrance test, by assuring itself that the newcomer was determined to respect the letter and the spirit of the 1863 Resolutions. One example will show how wisely Gustave Moynier and his colleagues fixed certain conditions of entry into the Red Cross family. Moynier wrote to a group of missionary doctors who had formed a Chinese Red Cross Society in Seoul, which was then part of the Chinese Empire :

" We are unable officially to recognize the existence of a Red Cross Society in a State which is not a signatory of the Geneva Convention . . . So long as the accession of China to that treaty has not been diplomatically regulated, the recognition of any such Chinese Red Cross Society must be rejected."

It must not be forgotten that the use of the emblem of the Red Cross is regulated by the Convention of 1864. It belongs to Governments. Consequently by only permitting Societies to call upon the Red Cross in States parties to the Convention, abuses in the use of the sign and hence its weakening were thereby avoided. Moynier imposed another no less important condition. He continued:

" And here I must add that in the event of China acceding to the Geneva Convention, it would not seem to me that the Society of medical missionaries would be qualified, in spite of its importance and usefulness, to be affiliated to the Red Cross. We can only recognize one Society alone for each State, and that Society must possess a *national* character ; your own, since it consists exclusively of foreigners, would not therefore fulfil this essential condition."

These Societies which were springing up one after the other in more and more countries, risked a great and insidious danger. They were independent and they could organize themselves as they wished.

We have seen that this was a necessity, although a dangerous one, since these Societies developed, each one following its own way, to such an extent that their destinies risked diverging. Sooner or later, they could become so different, that the whole unity and the community of interest in the movement would be affected. This accounts for the multiple efforts made by the Committee to ensure that they kept that family spirit which they possess today. The Committee had no power whatsoever over them, having no other resource but that of persuasion. This is in fact what led it to formulate the doctrine of the Red Cross of which it became the guardian. Gustave Moynier's great merit lies in his having kept the various Red Cross Societies on parallel tracks by producing a mass of books, pamphlets and documents. This work continued without interruption. After Moynier, Max Huber took up the torch in his writing filled with such a rare quality of thought as to be given world-wide respect.

This then is the Committee, and if I have been led to talk about it to you at such length, it was not to inflate its rôle, but because it was towards it and at that time that were raised those problems of structure which still govern all relations between the national and the international institutions of the Red Cross. Here we have then the International Committee called upon by the very nature of things to perform new tasks which none could have foreseen. In the Red Cross world and within the Committee itself one question was then raised, which was for nearly twenty years to be the object of passionate discussion. This was the question :

Is the Committee, formed as it is of some few Genevese, the body which best corresponds to such functions ? There were several currents of opinion on this subject.

Some held the view that there should be some modification in the composition of this Committee which was only international in name. Moynier was the first to consider that, as the Committee would, in time of war, very soon be given information on the needs of both sides, since it controls relief in countries at war, the best solution would be to include in it one member from each National Society.

Others, on the other hand, believed that in time of war men

belonging to the belligerent countries would find the greatest difficulty in working together. The harmony indispensable to the Committee's activity would thus be seriously jeopardized. The best thing would therefore be to stake in some sort on Switzerland's perpetual neutrality.

To this divergence of opinion, there was added yet another view. The Committee, as we have seen, had no power itself over the National Societies and did not claim to be other than an information bureau. Some saw in this a serious defect. They considered that the Committee, being called upon to play a regulating rôle in time of war, should be given a certain amount of authority.

Opposing these partisans of a hierarchical organization, there were many who maintained that the independence of the National Societies was an asset which should on no account be discarded.

Let us rather hear the different views expressed by the leading figures of the Red Cross.

First of all, there was the famous Clara Barton, foundress and President of the very powerful American Red Cross Society. With that passion which she brought to everything, she defended the authoritarian point of view. " The American Central Committee ", she said, " approves and supports the idea of a central power which it considers indispensable for the implementation of the Pact of 1864. No one should have any doubts that by strengthening the powers of the International Committee, the National Societies would increase their own effectiveness, just as in a living organism one would seek to strengthen the heart in order to improve the circulation of the blood." Clara Barton had weighty allies amongst the members of the Russian Society, whose spokesman the celebrated Frederick de Martens went even further. He wanted not only that the Committee had power over the National Societies, but that these powers should be enshrined by a treaty of international law. He drew attention to the position of the International Committee, which is " singular, almost bizarre. I do not know ", he said, " any part of jurisprudence or of human science to which that body, which calls itself the Geneva Committee, can attach itself. A child was born in Geneva in 1863 which we all cherish. That child received the name of the International Committee, it was baptised, but it was not registered ; it has never been given civil status. One admits the existence of that child, but we refuse to recognize it. This is a most extraordinary situation."

We find no less convinced views expressed by those holding opinions opposed to a rational organization. The Belgian Committee declared that " the International Committee as it exists has rendered great service during the last war. Its moral authority has been accepted and praised by the whole world, precisely because it was entirely unofficial and in no way imposed itself." Marshal Mac-Mahon, President of the French Aid Society for the Wounded, thought along the same lines. He considered that " the National Red Cross Societies, whilst being united by a bond of fellowship, must retain in their relations between each other as in their sphere of action, a freedom which no obligation, even if it is made in principle, could in any way impair."

The Red Cross had to make a choice between two such currents of opinion. It did so at the International Conference at Karlsruhe in 1887. There had been many wars since 1870, during which the rôle of neutral intermediary played by the International Committee had increased its authority and the confidence placed in it by National Societies as well as by governments. This was so much the case that the Commission charged with deciding upon the Committee's composition and powers was to put an end to a controversy which had lasted for more than twenty years by pronouncing in favour of the " status quo ". In the words of the Marquis de Vogüé, Rapporteur of that Commission, " There is one factor which dominates the history of the origins and the development of the work of the Red Cross : that is the existence in Geneva of a special Committee whose action has only been demonstrated by the rendering of services, which has deserved the respect of all by its disinterestedness . . . This Geneva Committee has exercised its benevolent action with an authority which has been all the greater for its having been entirely of a moral character and which was voluntarily accepted. Now, the formal recognition of certain rights would of necessity imply definitions, an interference in the recruiting and functioning of the Committee, which would raise a host of delicate questions, the discussion of which might risk compromising the very existence of the Committee. . . . Let the Geneva Committee remain therefore as it is, having more duties than rights, and not having the exclusive monopoly of any of the works of the Red Cross, but continue to be the expression of its international action."

This is the very definition of the International Committee as it is today.

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We spoke a short while ago of " International Conferences of the Red Cross ". We must now see in what these Conferences consist, as they are an important cog in the machine. These assemblies are one of the oldest institutions of the Red Cross, or rather an old custom which has become established. The first of these took place in Paris in 1867. The last, the XIXth, was held in New Delhi in 1957.

One can see how useful are these international conferences. The Red Cross Societies have a large number of common problems, there is therefore nothing more natural for them to have shown the need, from the outset, of coming together to study them, to exchange their experiences and together to look for the best solutions. One might be tempted to think that these Conferences would have been attended only by representatives of all the Red Cross institutions. But since these were Red Cross Conferences they had to be unlike any others. In fact, all States signatories to the Geneva Conventions are invited to be represented. This is self-evident. The sign called for by the National Societies as well as by the International Committee is a military emblem, whose protective use is regulated by the Geneva Convention. This sign does not belong to the Societies, but to the States parties to the Convention. And this, we must not forget, constitutes the second leaf of the diptych suggested by Dunant: Aid Societies-International Convention. There has indeed always been a parallel development of these two aspects of the Red Cross, the former arousing the other and the latter legalising and facilitating the other's action. What was unexpected was not so much that the States were invited to the Conferences, but that they accepted to take an active part in them, at the risk of seeing themselves, as sovereign States, being placed in a minority by mere private associations. They have shown themselves to be most assiduous in their participation and reap much benefit therefrom.

For one of the tasks of the Red Cross consists in drawing conclusions from experience gained after every conflict. And precisely because they followed this work with such close attention and because they assessed the degree of confidence which can be placed in the Red Cross, they were to bend the laws of war in the direction for which they were hoping, in other words by finding the best way of assisting the victims of armed conflicts.

The International Conferences of the Red Cross constitute the highest, I would even go so far as to say, the only deliberative authority of the Red Cross. They adopt resolutions, sometimes in most categoric terms. But on whom are these resolutions imposed ? On no one ! The National Societies are generally prone to be inspired by them, but no one obliges them to be so. This also applies to the International Committee. It is not otherwise for the League of Red Cross Societies of which we must now speak.

In order to understand the rôle of this new and latest arrival in the Red Cross movement, one should return for a moment to the special relationship existing before its foundation between the National Red Cross Societies and the Geneva Committee, which was the only international body. The International Committee is composed exclusively of Swiss nationals, recruited by co-optation.

As regards the latter, the National Societies have complete freedom of action and autonomy. The very needs of their action in time of war demand this, as they would assuredly lose the confidence of their countries' authorities if they were in any way to owe allegiance to some foreign authority.

Inversely, the International Committee in no way depends on the National Societies nor is it in any manner beholden to them. It only answers for its actions to itself. How could one, in fact, believe that governments would allow its delegates to penetrate camps, visit prisons, talk without witnesses, if they felt that the Committee were to make a report to all and sundry ? The whole strength of the Committee as regards governments at war resides in this sovereignty and in its discretion. It was for these reasons that the " status quo " of 1887 was maintained. As Pierre Boissier, the author of *L'épée et la Balance* and of the *Histoire du Comité international de la Croix-Rouge*, the first volume of which appeared for the Centenary, has so aptly said . . . " This is a strange arrangement but it is based on the necessities of war, it is a tracing of the features of the world such as it appears when conflicts divide and cut it into fragments, and it is a fact that this whole functions very well, thanks to the extreme suppleness of its articulation. In the eddies of war it is like a seal in the waves. But in peace one must admit that its steps are somewhat strange and clumsy."

Moynier was not entirely wrong in hoping to add a member from each National Society to the Committee. His idea, however, was premature so long as the Red Cross was only expected to act in

time of war. For the internationalisation of the Committee or the addition of a new body to the Red Cross to be justified, it was necessary to find a set of most exceptional circumstances.

Now, these combined circumstances were found at the end of the First World War. Throughout the conflict the Red Cross Societies of the belligerent countries as well as those of several neutral countries, had accomplished superhuman tasks. Five years of a particularly ferocious world war, in which the victims, both military and civilian, were no longer to be counted by tens of thousands, but by millions, had demanded from them, as from the International Committee, prodigies of improvisation and devotion and a great variety of actions. With the armistice they had at their disposal vast quantities of relief supplies and numbers of people of goodwill which it appeared urgent to use, with the arrival of peace, to come to the aid of populations, the victims of the war, in order to contribute to rebuilding from an accumulation of ruins and misery such as history had never seen before. All these impassable barriers, the front line or the maritime blockade which had prevented the carrying out of direct acts of international fellowship, obliging them to pass through the neutral intermediary of Geneva, all these barriers had now fallen.

To these one should add one other factor of a psychological nature. The world war, it was everywhere thought, was the " war to end all wars ", the very ultimate conflict. Amidst universal embracing one believed that the Armistice of 1918 would open up an era finally of lasting peace. To ensure such a peace and concord amongst the nations, the League of Nations was created. In such a climate, the original rôle of the National Societies, as that of the International Committee, suddenly appeared as a somewhat archaic survival from barbarous times which would never again return. Hence the idea which came from the National Societies of the allied countries of themselves also creating a League, of federating, with a view first of all to accomplishing this work of aid for the raising from the ruins, then for new peacetime tasks, this reservoir of men of goodwill, this vast amount of devotion and experience which they had accumulated and tested under fire through five years of war.

For if, it was thought, the suffering caused by the war between States had been forever abolished, there remained those which are the results of that other sort of war which nature wages against man : cataclysms, earthquakes, floods, famine and epidemics, not

to mention a lack of hygiene and misery too. A new field of action with apparently unlimited horizons offered itself to men of goodwill mobilized by war. It was thus that the League of National Societies first saw the light of day in 1919, for the realignment of Red Cross activities.

It is a real federation of National Societies. Its supreme authority, the Board of Governors, is an assembly composed of one representative from each member National Society. It should be emphasized that whilst this federation originated from a group of allies of the First World War, it tended straight away towards universality. This goal it has reached since nearly all the existing National Societies belong to it, although it is an association, membership of which is optional by its statutes. A Society could not enter or resign or be excluded without losing its entity as a recognized Society or as a member of the International Conference. Thus it seems that the League has reconciled, at least as regards its activities in time of peace, these tendencies towards internationalism on the one hand with the setting up, on the other hand, of a certain authority which the Karlsruhe Conference of 1887 had discarded, when the Red Cross was still only thought of for time of war. It really seems as if it has reconciled these tendencies with the independence necessary for the National Societies. These find a certain authority in the councils of the League for federation affairs, and in its Secretariat, a body which is at their disposal, a Study centre, instrument of co-ordination of their activities and a vehicle of international fellowship in time of peace. It is under the impulse of this federation that the National Society has become in many countries a pioneer in matters of hygiene, of the prevention of sickness, blood-transfusion and many others besides, thanks to the example and support of other Societies, as well as making great efforts for educating the young. As for the rôle of the League as collector and co-ordinator of relief, the names recently heard of Agadir, Lar and Skopje are eloquent witness.

Finally, there is the Standing Commission, a body which has a special character. Emanating from the International Conference which it symbolizes to a certain extent in the interval between sessions, it has an administrative rôle. It makes preparations for the next Conference : it also acts as referee in the event of disputes arising from the interpretation and the application of the Statutes. Its task is also to assure, if need be, the co-ordination and the

harmonization of the efforts of the International Committee and the League, although any decision it may take cannot in any way affect the independence and the initiative of either.

National Societies, International Committee, Red Cross Conferences, League of Red Cross Societies, Standing Commission, we now have the main bodies of the Institution. The whole which they constitute leads one to a number of reflections by way of conclusion.

The first thing which must be said is that the Red Cross was not born like Minerva, fully armed, from some international Jupiter. The various weapons with which it is accoutred have appeared one after the other and each one has an entirely concrete need. The Red Cross does not deal with the abstract, but with facts or rather a succession of facts.

However, thought is not absent, but springs from the act which precedes it. From this it has forged an instrument which has in turn enabled it to renew it, by extending aid to new categories of victims. One can see this process from the days of lint to the control of vessels on the high seas, which was the subject of yesterday's lecture.

You will also certainly not have failed to observe that all these elements of the Red Cross originated from private enterprise. This International Committee, which was created on February 17, 1863 and which had sufficient temerity and enough authority to convene an international Conference comprising government representatives, possessed no statutes of any sort until 1915, that is to say in the very midst of a world war. Is this fully realized ? It was in fact a group, without legal basis, of a few private individuals who had no mandate apart from that which they had assigned to themselves.

Today, this same Committee is mentioned sixty times in the Geneva Conventions. The forty million prisoner-of-war card-indexes of its Agency, the 450,000 tons of parcels transported during the last world war across the various fronts and through blockades show what tasks it may be called upon to perform. Its legal status it holds neither from these Conventions nor from any supra-governmental authority. Its status is that of a private law association under the Swiss Civil Code no more in fact than that of a mere bowling club ! Its authority it holds from no legal text, but from a hundred years of action.

Did you know that the International Conferences of the Red Cross have only been governed by statute since 1928 ? And do you

think that the League of Red Cross Societies could have been created so rapidly in 1919 if there had not previously been such close co-operation, during the war, between the National Societies which founded it ? Finally, were you aware that the " Red Cross principles " of which one constantly speaks, were not thought of being formulated straightaway by the founders of the movement ? It was only gradually, based on acts and step by step, that a doctrine was evolved. One had still to wait a century, after a systematic study had been made by Mr. J. Pictet, before a Red Cross assembly undertook to promulgate a coherent list from it.

All this and this extraordinary margin of liberty and independence which exists between the various bodies forming the Red Cross, are one of the most astonishing characteristics of our work. This is what made Moynier call the Red Cross an elusive thing. He added, not without malice, that such an organization was doubtless not to be recommended to those wishing to found some other philanthropical organization.

This structure of the Red Cross is unique of its kind. It cannot be compared with any other international body. But it is unique also in its sphere of action, since there are circumstances and in spite of, or perhaps because of this organic weakness, which leaves it all its freedom, where the Red Cross alone is able to go to certain places, to cross frontiers and the battle line, force its way through the barbed wire of camps and into prisons. It alone enabled the founders and our predecessors to choose this outstanding motto, an active protest against war : " inter arma caritas ".

Is this not a challenge to our successors to accomplish more and more actions of peace through the new hundred years to come " in the service of mankind ".

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