

PIERRE BOISSIER

HENRY DUNANT



HENRY DUNANT INSTITUTE

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A short biography of Henry Dunant that will appeal to readers of all kinds has so far been lacking. By an extraordinary stroke of luck, Pierre Boissier, Director of the Institute that bears the name of the originator of the Red Cross, had dictated an essay on those lines shortly before his death. The very day before the tragic accident in which he lost his life, he had gone through his draft and had asked M^{me} Yvonne de Pourtalès to complete and put the finishing touches to it. This she has accomplished remarkably well in all respects.

It is with pleasure that we lay before the public this valuable literary document, which not only meets a practical need but is also the last work of a man who had devoted so much of his life to the Red Cross and to the Institute of which he was the guiding spirit.

Jean PICTET

President of the Henry-Dunant Institute

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“ The man of genius does not ordinarily soar easily to heights to dominate the earth, but hacks a way through a thousand obstacles ; he is long unknown, fiercely criticized and often rejected by half his generation.”

Franz Liszt

In July 1887, a traveller, carrying nothing in his hands, crossed the border into Switzerland. Walking on, he reached after a while Heiden, a small township dominating the Lake of Constance, with a view over lovely countryside. Some children playing in the main square paused a moment to watch his bent and sombre form go by. The stranger made his way, with listless steps, to the Hotel Paradis, where he managed to keep himself alive for some time with just a few pence. He was so poor that he had to stay in bed on the days his linen was washed, as he possessed no change of clothing. From his silvery white beard, people assumed him to be quite old, but, in fact, he was only 59 years of age at the time when poverty and wretchedness drove him to seek refuge in this place deep in the country. His health was very poor and his body was consumed by the severe hardships he had too long endured. His right hand, inflamed by eczema, was so sore and painful that he could not write.

As he lay sick in bed, he was filled with bitterness and resentment. It was not long before he was taken to the local hospital where he paid the sum of three francs a day, remitted to him by his family as soon as they got to know of the wretched condition he was in. At the hospital, he was nursed back to health, thanks to the friendly care of its Dr. Altherr and was able once more to write. He started to set down his autobiography in the large copy-books such as schoolchildren use, in a bold handwriting at first which, as he grew older, showed signs of trembling, seeking to preserve his ideas from oblivion. It cannot be said that his had been a dull life: joys there had been and tragic events in plenty, but never dryness or boredom.

He often referred in his writings to those enemies who had persecuted him and who probably were still seeking to track him down in order to torment him further. He detested all pharisaical dissemblers and hypocrites. When he died, he wanted to be “buried like a pauper”, without any of those empty ceremonial formalities which for him no longer meant anything. In the hospital at Heiden, the room he occupied bore the number 12.

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When fortune knocks at the gate, do not hesitate to let it in. Georg Baumberger was swift to seize his chance. For a young reporter, it was a stroke of luck to have discovered that Henry Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross, was still alive. That was certainly an unexpected piece of news! Everyone thought him dead. For many years his name had not been mentioned by anyone, and now, it seemed that he was living alone like an anchorite in a village in the east of Switzerland. Baumberger lost no time, rushed off to Heiden and at the hospital was directed to room No. 12.

At first, the aged Henry Dunant was not at all willing to talk to this inquisitive newspaper man. Then, all of a sudden, as if carried away by the rush of memories of the past, he held himself back no longer. Though his voice was slightly cracked, the eyes partly hidden by drooping eyelids, there was still extraordinary fire and internal vigour in this man who suddenly launched into a tale of one of the most singular and most contrasted lives that ever was.

Baumberger's story created a sensation. It was reprinted in a large number of newspapers and within a few days was read all over Europe.

In 1895, at the time Baumberger traced Dunant, people throughout the world knew of the Red Cross. After Europe, it had gained America, Africa, Asia. Thirty-seven countries, several of which were great powers, had formed each their own National Red Cross Society, and in many cases the Societies possessed their own hos-

pitals, schools and ambulance trains. The Red Cross had intervened in thirty-eight armed conflicts, putting into practice its motto, "Inter Arma Caritas", which might at first sight have appeared almost impossible to follow. Hundreds of thousands of wounded soldiers, who but for the Red Cross would have been left to die on the battlefield, were saved from death.

Forty-two states had by then signed the Geneva Convention on respect of the wounded, and jurists had come to recognize in it one of the firmest bulwarks of international law.

What a contrast between the spectacular expansion of the new movement and this poverty-stricken old man suddenly emerging from his dark corner! Could it be that it was truly he who had been at the origin of all that?

A few months later, on 8 May 1896, on his 68th birthday, Dunant lived a day of triumph. Messages of admiration poured in from all over the globe. The Pope was one of many eminent persons who wrote to him in their own hand; tangible tributes of the gratitude which the whole world owed to Dunant were sent. In Germany, a public subscription was organized for his benefit. A congress gathering a thousand Russian doctors awarded him the "Prix de Moscou", in recognition of his services to suffering humanity. Switzerland and several other countries came forward with offers of assistance. He was made member or honorary president of a large number of Red Cross Societies and welfare organizations.

From one day to the other, Dunant became a celebrity once more. Indifferent to fame, he refused to see any of his illustrious visitors, shut himself in against intruders and plunged with all his former energy into the struggle for international arbitration, disarmament and peace.

Everywhere in Europe, people again responded to the fervour of his appeals, and in 1901 the first Nobel Peace Prize was awarded by the Norwegian Parliament to him and his old comrade-in-arms, the pacifist Frédéric Passy.

But Dunant knew well the true worth of honours and made the necessary arrangements to bequeath this wealth, in which he

did not wish to have any part, to charitable institutions in Switzerland and Norway. He wrote some premonitory essays on the troubled state of the world in the twentieth century,¹ saw from time to time some children and a few rare friends, and died on 30 October 1910, in the year that saw the passing away of two great figures, Florence Nightingale and Leo Tolstoy, for whom he had an equal admiration.

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Henry Dunant was born on 8 May 1828 in Geneva. From his native town and his solid middle-class family background he acquired breeding, polish, a wide knowledge of the world and a strict Protestant education.

His mother, a sister of the celebrated physicist Daniel Colladon, exerted a great influence over him, as he himself acknowledged in his Memoirs.²

Su cha vast and u niversalhu manitarianwork does not develop from circu mstances fortu itou slThe instru mentu tilized must be prepa redbeforehand for the work for which it is destined.

She aroused in him

a keen compassion for the u nhappy,the hu mble,the oppressed, the ou tcastsof society. Since he was eighteen he (Du nant)devoted his spare time to visiting the needy, the handicapped, the dying, offering them aid and consolation. When he was twenty, he spent his Su nday aft ernoonreading ou talou dbooks on travel, history or elementary science to the prisoner spaying for their off ences in gaol in Geneva. In short, he had begu nto care for casu altiesof society stru ckdown by fate, in time of peace, well before concerning himself with the wou ndedin war.

His father, Jean-Jacques Dunant, was a merchant who was also a magistrate in the Geneva Court of Wards, and from whom he learnt at an early age to do good. On leaving school, Dunant

¹ In "L'avenir sanglant", one of a collection of essays.

² Our translation from the original French. The same applies to the other passages from Henry Dunant's letters and memoirs quoted here.

spent some time in a bank, learning the business. Already in 1849, under the influence of a movement known as the "Awakening" and moved by an ardent personal faith, he joined a group of young people of the Free Church and exchanged letters with similar groups in England, France, Germany, Holland and the United States. He at once perceived the possibility of an international and ecumenical movement, and in 1855, with friends who had come to Paris for the Universal Exhibition, founded the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, better known as the YMCA.

As soon as he found a suitable opportunity, he left Geneva to seek his fortune in Algeria, conquered twenty years earlier by Louis-Philippe's armies. He immediately fell under the fascination of that land, opened up to the spirit of enterprise, and crossed it in all directions observing everything with a singularly discerning eye. Going as far as Tunisia, he wrote about that country in a book to which he modestly gave the title "Notice sur la Régence de Tunis",¹ and in which the vivacity of his style is already apparent. He devoted much diligence to the study of Islam and, unlike most Christians of his time, approached that religion, considered by some to be a heathen cult, with the utmost respect, not hiding the admiration which he felt for it in many regards. He went so far as to take lessons in Arabic and practised the difficult art of Arabic calligraphy. What is more, he developed a great affection for the people of North Africa, and when he undertook to set up in Algeria, not far from Mons-Djémila, a large agricultural estate, he vowed to himself that, on his property at least, he would see that Algerian workers were happy and well paid.

But Dunant had not taken into account the antagonism of the authorities. The company which he founded in 1858 under the name of *Société Anonyme des Moulins de Mons-Djémila* certainly possessed all that was needed to make it a success: the location was judiciously chosen, capital was adequate, and the mill itself was fitted with the most modern equipment. All that remained to be done was to obtain the land on which the wheat was to be grown. But now, to Dunant's dismay, the authorities turned a deaf ear. In vain he harried them, went from one department to another;

¹ An account of the Regency of Tunisia.

everywhere he ran up against blunt opposition. In desperation, with the intention of approaching higher-placed officials, he went to Paris, spending all his time outside the offices of various ministers, but there, too, he was put off with vague answers.

Still higher up, there was only the Emperor himself to turn to. But Napoleon III was already far from Paris. Taking up the cause of Italian independence, at the head of his French army, he was already fighting the Austrian forces under the command of their youthful Emperor Franz-Josef.

Dunant decided that he too would go to Lombardy.

When he arrived there, the region was devastated by war; several battles had taken place, at Montebello, Palestro, Magenta, but everyone felt that the clash that was to settle the war was imminent.

This decisive battle, the bloodiest carnage in Europe since Waterloo, broke out on 24 June 1859, not far from Solferino. Dunant was not far away and, drawn in his carriage at a fast trot, could distinctly hear the gunfire. A few minutes later, he was to receive the greatest shock of his life.

As night fell, he entered Castiglione. The village was jammed, in great confusion, with a large number of the wounded from the neighbouring battlefield. Nine thousand were crowded in the streets, squares and churches. For Dunant, without any warning, it was the first, brutal encounter with the horrors of war.

Overwhelmed by the sight, Dunant alighted from the carriage, went through the town and climbed the road leading to the main church, the Chiesa Maggiore. All down the slope, in a channel dug to collect rainwater, blood flowed without stopping, for days and days.

Dunant entered the church. It was filled with wounded troops, some lying inert, some moaning, others screaming with pain. The nave was alive with clouds of flies and reeked of a nauseous smell compounded of excretion and gangrene.

Although lacking any medical knowledge, Dunant all the same attempted to clean the wounds, to make up dressings and fix up some sort of couch for those wounded who had been flung down unceremoniously on the stony floor. They were all tortured by thirst. He got them some water to drink from the fountain. He

listened to the last wishes of the dying, put his arm under their head and spoke a few words of comfort. He managed to persuade a number of the local women to help. They hesitated at first, reluctant to care for French soldiers, for they feared the Austrians would return in force and punish them for having assisted enemy troops. But Dunant persuaded them that suffering was the same for all people, that this was the only thing which mattered. Soon, the women, too, were repeating his words: *Tutti fratelli*.

In addition to compassion, Dunant felt growing in him another feeling: indignation. For he heard the same phrase crossing the lips of all those wounded men, whom he tended night and day: *Ah! Sir, we fought well, and now we have been left to die.*

Dunant was shocked at the very idea of those men being deserted, forsaken. Only very occasionally would some mules be sent to fetch the wounded, a few at a time, from the battlefield. Those abandoned there were at the mercy of looters who, when darkness fell, would even strip them of their clothing, leaving them to die from exhaustion and thirst. Even the wounded lucky enough to be helped along by a compassionate comrade or those who were able to drag themselves to a spot where they hoped to find someone to care for them were not much better off. Dunant was in a good position to judge the situation. He found that there were only six French army doctors available for the nine thousand wounded in Castiglione, and to his horror he realized that this was no mere stroke of ill-fortune, but that it had always been so, that this monstrous disproportion between the number of troops and the medical services was due to the fact that the latter were so small and under-staffed that they were practically non-existent. A soldier who was not in a fit state to fight was not worth anything to anyone.

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Henry Dunant's business trip was a failure, for the meeting with Napoleon III he had hoped to arrange did not take place. Back in Paris, he resumed his struggle against the inertia he met with everywhere in government offices. Two years went by in this way, from one antechamber to another. Would the memory of Castiglione recede in the mists of time? Surely not, for he was

haunted by the horror he had witnessed; it pursued him with a vague compulsion, as if he felt deep within himself that there was still something he had to do.

Then, one day, quite suddenly, he could not stand it any longer. He returned to Geneva and, alone in his room, carried away by his inspiration, he wrote the book to which he gave the title *Un Souvenir de Solférino*.

He wanted his readers, too, to share that awful shock he had experienced on discovering those aspects of war which are generally nearly always carefully hidden and suppressed. He intended to get them to follow him into the wings of the theatres of war, into the battlefields reeking of pestilence and blood. The book was a tremendous success; it was even acclaimed as a great work of literary art, one of the finest examples of the naturalist school. The brothers Goncourt, whose essays could often be so biting critical, wrote:¹

I am carried away with emotion on reading these pages. They reach the sublime, touching the innermost depths of one's feeling. It is more beautiful, a thousand times more beautiful, than Homer, than the Retreat of the Ten Thousand, than anything . . . One sets this book aside calling down malediction on all wars.

Dunant must have felt this loathing of war more than anyone else, and no one can read his book without sharing his feeling. But that was not the purpose he had in mind. His object was to stress all that which was odious in war: mobilizing soldiers, exposing them to countless hardships and dangers, and then leaving them to die like cattle when enemy fire had rendered them helpless and unable to fight.

He accordingly turned to public opinion:

It is therefore an appeal that we must launch . . . to men of all countries and of all classes, to the mighty of this world as well as to the humblest of workers . . . It is made to ladies and to men alike . . . to generals as much as to other ranks, to the philanthropist and to the writer . . .

¹ Our translation from the original French.

Dunant went on to make constructive proposals:

. . . On certain special occasions when princes of the art of war belonging to different nationalities meet . . . would it not be desirable that they should take advantage of this sort of congress to formulate some international principle, sanctioned by a convention inviolate in character, which, once agreed upon and ratified, might constitute the basis for Societies for the relief of the wounded in the different countries of Europe? . . .

Humanity and civilization call imperatively for such an organization as is here suggested . . . Is there in the world a prince or a monarch who would decline to lend his support . . . Is there any State that would hesitate to give its protection to those endeavouring in this manner to preserve the lives of useful citizens . . . Is there a single officer, a single general . . . a single quarter-master or a single military doctor . . .?

Would it not be possible, in time of peace and quiet, to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in war-time by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers?

It may be said that the whole matter is contained in that question.

Countless letters from all over Europe showed Dunant that he had plucked a responsive chord of that romantic feeling which was so easily moved in the mid-nineteenth century. It so happened that at that time one of his readers in Geneva was a man for whom compassion was intolerably inadequate.

Gustave Moynier was barely a couple of years older than Dunant. In 1862, the year *Un Souvenir de Solférino* was published, he was thirty-six years old, a jurist by profession and an extremely hard worker who had dedicated himself to the social betterment of his fellow men. He was deeply absorbed in the study of social problems and one of his many activities consisted in presiding over the most respectable Geneva Public Welfare Society.

Having read *Un Souvenir de Solférino* and having agreed with its conclusions, Moynier, not being the sort of man to sit back and do nothing, called on Dunant. The two men were as much unlike one another as could possibly be imagined, though they possessed qualities that were complementary in certain respects. It was not

surprising that they never had much understanding for one another; and yet they did agree upon something: to set up in Geneva a small committee which would translate Dunant's ideas into real action.

Formed in February 1863, the Committee was composed—most wisely—of only five people:

General Dufour, its first president,
Gustave Moynier, who later presided over the Committee with
a firm hand for half a century,
Henry Dunant, its secretary,
Doctor Louis Appia, deeply interested in military surgery, and
Doctor Theodore Maunoir.

Those five “Gentlemen of Geneva” soon decided upon a plan of action.

In common with Dunant, they considered that all countries, even before any question of war arose, should form societies which would have available trained “relief volunteers” and all kinds of stores, such as medical equipment, stretchers, lint and so forth. As soon as a war broke out, the societies would immediately go to the theatre of operations to provide support to the modest medical services of their respective armies.

The scheme seemed simple enough. But it still remained to be seen whether governments and armies would tolerate the presence of civilians, whom they considered as bungling amateurs, on the battlefield.

Like King Wilhelm I of Prussia, who confided to the Czar that it was not an easy matter to be king under Chancellor Bismarck, Moynier found it was not plain sailing to be president with Dunant as secretary. For Dunant was pressing him to engage in a further undertaking.

In the course of his investigations on wars and his conversations with his Dutch friend, Dr. Basting, Dunant discovered that if a military doctor stepped out in the area separating the belligerents, an enemy would immediately shoot at him. There was no reason why he should withhold his fire. There was nothing to show that the man in uniform advancing out in the open was only going to pick up wounded men. If he were an infantry doctor, he would be wearing infantry uniform, and if he were a cavalry doctor, he

would be wearing calvary uniform; as such, he was a legitimate target. The same thing would apply if a wagon came within range; the enemy would make attempts to blow it up. There was no way of showing whether or not it held only wounded men. Then again, a house behind the enemy lines with soldiers busying themselves around it could justifiably be attacked. It was unfortunate that there was nothing to show it was a field hospital; otherwise no fire would have been directed against it. Why kill off some wretches who were already no longer capable of inflicting any injury?

Dunant's very great merit was that he devised the means of changing such situations which were both deadly and absurd. The solution he proposed was of such elementary simplicity—the simplicity of genius—that all were astonished that it had not been thought of earlier.

All that was necessary was to agree upon a single special emblem for all armies. It would be worn by doctors and nurses, painted on ambulance wagons, and its flag would fly on medical units and field hospitals. In short, the emblem was to identify all those who, while being members of an army, nevertheless did not take any part in the fighting and, therefore, for that very reason, should not be attacked. This sign was to render anyone bearing it immune from attack, to confer upon him a new legal status, which Dunant called “neutrality”.

In fact, this concept was so startlingly new that the other members of the International Committee greeted it extremely cautiously. Besides, the whole enterprise appeared to be beyond their means. Would it not be necessary to obtain from governments reciprocal promises through the conclusion of a treaty of international law? But nothing of the kind had ever been witnessed before. A customary law of war did in fact exist, certain customs were the rule, but a formal contract, compelling belligerents to modify their actions on the battlefield, seemed inconceivable. Was not war, precisely, the breach of all law?

All the same, how could one resist Dunant when he called upon logic and humanity to support his arguments?

Dunant's plan was very simple: he would write to all the sovereigns of Europe inviting them to send representatives to a conference, the place and the date of which were fixed beforehand:

Geneva, 26 October 1863. At the beginning of September, ignoring the doubts expressed by his colleagues, he travelled at his own expense to Berlin, where the International Statistical Congress was being held. His aim was to set out his ideas and gather support from international circles: in other words “create a stir”. There, with the help of his friend Dr. Basting, he drafted a circular, which he had printed at his own expense and on his sole initiative, inviting governments to send delegates to the Geneva Conference. At the foot of the form of agreement which had been proposed by the Geneva Committee, he added an article on his neutrality idea and signed with the words “Le Comité de Genève”.

At the receptions organized during the Congress, Dunant met a number of highly placed persons and extracted from them assurances that they would get their governments to send delegates to Geneva. Dunant was introduced to the King of Prussia and to the Crown Prince and Crown Princess; they all had read his book and received him warmly. After Berlin, he visited Dresden, Vienna, Munich, where he was received successively by King John of Saxony, the Archduke Rainer, the Bavarian Minister for War, and many others. Wherever he went, he was enthusiastically welcomed. *A nation*, declared John of Saxony, *that would refuse to endorse this idea would be proscribed by public opinion throughout Europe*. The tour was a tremendous success!

On 20 October, Dunant returned to Geneva. The “Committee of Five” were very guarded on the subject of the Berlin circular. Moynier was most distant and considered that his idea of neutrality was, to say the least, premature.

Nevertheless, replies started to flow in, exceeding all hopes.

On 26 October, the International Conference opened in Geneva; the response fully came up to its organizers’ expectations. It was a triumphant achievement: eighteen representatives from fourteen governments were present. All the same, the participants, comprising senior officers, military doctors and quarter-masters general, showed at first some scepticism, because of the sheer novelty and daring of the project before them. They all had to admit that the Army Medical Services were inadequate and they recognized that well organized societies, fully prepared to act should war break out, could render valuable services and save the lives of vast numbers

of people. It was finally in an atmosphere of enthusiasm that the Conference drafted a number of resolutions. The main provisions were the following:

Article 1. — Each country shall have a Committee whose duty it shall be, in time of war and if the need arises, to assist the Army Medical Services by every means in its power.

Article 5. — In time of war, the Committees of belligerent nations shall supply relief to their respective armies as far as their means permit; in particular, they shall organize voluntary personnel and place them on an active footing and, in agreement with the military authorities, shall have premises made available for the care of the wounded.

How would these voluntary auxiliaries be recognized and how would they be distinguished from ordinary civilians? Here again, the resolutions enlighten us:

Article 8. — They (i.e. voluntary medical personnel) shall wear in all countries, as a uniform distinctive sign, a white armlet with a red cross.

As for the question of neutrality, so close to Dunant's heart, the second of the three recommendations made by the Conference was worded as follows:

That in time of war the belligerent nations should proclaim the neutrality of ambulances and military hospitals, and that neutrality should likewise be recognized, fully and absolutely, in respect of official medical personnel, voluntary medical personnel, inhabitants of the country who go to the relief of the wounded, and the wounded themselves.

The date at the foot of this fundamental charter of the Red Cross should be remembered. It was the twenty-ninth of October 1863 and it marked the birth of the Red Cross.

Less than two months later, the "Comité International de Secours pour les militaires blessés" (or International Committee for Relief to Wounded Soldiers)—for that was the name adopted by the Committee of Five—were rejoiced to learn that the first Relief Society was formed in Wurtemberg. After that, events moved

fast. In less than a year, nine more societies were formed: in the Duchy of Oldenburg, Belgium, Prussia, Denmark, France, Italy (at Milan), Mecklenburg, Spain and Hamburg.

With Moynier, to adopt an idea meant to act. Once again, he and Dunant shared the work to be done. Moynier drafted the text of the treaty which they wished to see concluded, while Dunant, as before, threw himself into the sort of exercise that would have been described today as “public relations”, in which he excelled.

The recognized process towards the conclusion of a treaty is a diplomatic conference, and arranging for one to be held is not within the competence of ordinary citizens. It is necessary that the convocations be sent out by a government, and in this case it was the Swiss Government which declared itself willing to convene the conference, and not at Berne, Switzerland’s capital, but at Geneva, where the Red Cross was born. There still remained the business of creating a suitable atmosphere, stimulating the interest of government circles and persuading them to send to Geneva plenipotentiaries qualified to sign this new diplomatic instrument. This Dunant set out to do: the Germans were to a large extent already won over to his views, so it was to France that he turned his attention. He was so eloquent for the cause that he was able to gain the support of the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Drouyn de Lhuys. Instructions were sent to the French ambassadors to make known to the governments of the countries to which they were accredited that Napoleon III took a personal interest in the question of the neutrality of the Medical Services. It was sufficient to decide other countries in Europe.

The representatives of sixteen governments gathered on 8 August 1864 for the opening of the Conference. They had previously studied various texts prepared by the International Committee, and from the very start it was felt that they were filled by a sincere wish to reach agreement. The draft treaty, prepared by Moynier, was so ably worded that only some slight changes of detail were found to be necessary. A few days were therefore sufficient for the plenipotentiaries, meeting in Geneva’s ancient town hall, to decide upon the final text; this included the following passages:

Article 1. — Ambulances and military hospitals shall be recognized as neutral and, as such, protected and respected

by the belligerents as long as they accommodate wounded and sick.

Article 2. — Hospital and ambulance personnel, including the quarter-master's staff, the medical, administrative and transport services, and the chaplains, shall have the benefit of the same neutrality when on duty, and while there remain any wounded to be brought in or assisted.

Article 7. — A distinctive and uniform flag shall be adopted for hospitals, ambulances and evacuation parties. It should in all circumstances be accompanied by the national flag.

An armlet may also be worn by personnel enjoying neutrality but its issue shall be left to the military authorities.

Both flag and armlet shall bear a red cross on a white ground.

Here, once again, was the reference to the Red Cross emblem. But whereas a year earlier it was intended to designate only the voluntary workers who were members of Societies for Relief to Wounded Soldiers, its significance was now quite different. It conferred a special kind of status upon persons wearing the emblem and on the vehicles and buildings displaying it. It protected them by virtue of the solemn agreement entered into by the Powers and entitled: *Geneva Convention of August 22, 1864, for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field.*

This date, too, is one to remember, for this short convention consisting of ten articles is a milestone in the history of mankind. It opened the way to the whole of the treaty law relative to the rules of war as well as to all humanitarian law. The Hague Conventions, and still more directly the Geneva Conventions, sprang from it.

Although Dunant did not take part officially in the international conferences which followed—except for the 1867 Paris Conference where he was rapporteur on the question of prisoners of war—he fought singly, against all obstacles, for the propagation of his ideas and for the protection, by diplomatic conventions or international agreements, of prisoners of war, of wounded and shipwrecked members of armed forces at sea and of certain categories of civilians. Many years were to go by before, without Dunant, all such objectives were achieved.

Already at that time, disagreements had arisen within the Geneva Committee; criticisms, which he was loath to answer, were advanced against him and Moynier's attitude towards him was tempered with misgivings. Even before the opening of the Conference, on 29 May 1864, Dunant, weary of all those reproaches, wrote to Moynier:

Now, sir, I believe I have done everything I could possibly do to contribute to the advancement of our work and make it progress ; I would like to stand down completely. Do not count upon me for any active participation in it ; I intend to retire into the background. The enterprise has been set on foot ; I have only been an instrument in the hands of God ; it is now for others more qualified than I am to press on and make the undertaking advance.

Moynier demurred at Dunant's resignation, and Dunant yielded to persuasion to stay. Until 1867 he remained, therefore, as secretary of the International Committee.

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In June 1866, war broke out between Prussia and Austria.

The venerable Austrian Empire moved ponderously: in Vienna at that time, no Relief Society for the wounded had been formed; the Government had not acceded to the Geneva Convention. On the Prussian side, things were quite different. A number of Red Cross Societies were already well organized; the Geneva Convention was familiar to everyone. The difference was bound to show, and it turned out to be on a striking scale. On the one side, the medical services were quite inadequate; on the other, military doctors and nursing orderlies were backed by many admirably trained teams with excellent equipment. The Prussian Government applied the Geneva Convention scrupulously without demanding any reciprocity on the part of the enemy. The result was to be measured in the loss in human lives, which was on such a large scale that, even before the seven-week war ended, Austria acceded to the Geneva Convention.

On their return from Bohemia, the victorious Prussian troops were greeted triumphantly in Berlin. The whole capital was given over to rejoicings. The army marched through the streets decorated

with banners and triumphal arches. In the royal stand, a man in a black frock-coat was conspicuous among the glittering uniforms: it was Henry Dunant, the guest of Queen Augusta, who had herself tended the wounded and had measured the benefits of the organization placed under the sign of the red cross.

That evening, Dunant was the guest of the royal family. Wilhelm I expressed the admiration he felt for, and the significance he attached to, the Geneva Convention.

A couple of days later, Dunant was again received at the Palace. The Queen wore, in his honour, an armlet with the red cross, and after dinner conversed with him at length. She recalled the emotion she had felt on reading *Un Souvenir de Solférino* and told Dunant that she was a follower of his; that was the reason why she considered it her duty to go, in spite of the danger of cholera, to tend the wounded. Dunant was overwhelmed with joy; this indeed was the reward for all his labours. His work could not have received more flattering recognition. For him, it was the top of the Capitoline Hill, but his Tarpeian Rock was not far off.

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There are some problems that seem to sort themselves out all alone. Such were not unhappily those of the *Société Anonyme des Moulins de Mons-Djémila*, and the four years which its director had spent in saving the lives of wounded soldiers did not contribute to making the company's situation any easier. Everything was crumbling, the slightest tremor was enough to send the whole enterprise crashing to the ground. In 1867, the *Crédit Genevois*, a bank whose board of directors included Dunant, went bankrupt. The commercial court issued a severe sentence against the board of directors, but Dunant's name was not mentioned. When the proceedings came up again a year later before the civil court, all the members of the board of directors were convicted, but Dunant alone was held responsible for having "wilfully deceived" his colleagues.

Dunant was at one stroke totally ruined; saddled with a debt amounting to nearly a million francs! He received the news in Paris. He was never to see his native town again.

In later years, he related his wretched existence, at times reduced to spending his nights on street benches and in railway waiting-rooms. When he passed in front of a baker's shop, his whole body cried hunger; his socks were so full of holes that he daubed Indian ink on his heels to hide the fact.

Even so, at that same period, he was one day sent for by the Empress Eugénie, in her palace at the Tuileries. She asked him to prepare a draft extending the Geneva Convention to members of the navy, while he asked that the plight of prisoners of war should be considered.

In the meantime, doubts were being entertained by the International Committee. Already in the summer of 1867, even before the court of first instance had pronounced its judgment, Moynier was attempting to get rid of Dunant. Just about the time of the Paris "Exposition Universelle" Dunant, who was at the Red Cross Societies' Conference, wrote to his mother on 25 August:

I did not show that I had seen Monsieur Moynier and, as he made no move to come towards me, we neither saw nor met each other.

And yet, at the first session, he was nominated honorary member of the Committees of Austria, Holland, Sweden, Prussia and Spain, and was awarded, together with Gustave Moynier and General Dufour, the Exhibition Gold Medal.

Forestalling events, on 25 August Dunant sent the International Committee a letter, which Gustave Moynier read out to the other members at their meeting of 8 September, and in which Dunant announced his resignation as secretary of the Committee. It is recorded in the minutes of the meeting:

A reply will be sent to him accepting his resignation not only as secretary, but also as member of the Committee.

Such was the moral disrepute attached at the end of the nineteenth century to a bankrupt, and such was the price to be paid for it in the city of Calvin.

* * *

Then, in 1870, war broke out between France and Prussia.

Financially, Dunant was not in any better shape. By what superhuman efforts did he manage to climb out of the depths of

oblivion? No one can tell. But, in order once more to relieve the wounded, he again emerged into the world.

It will be recalled that Dunant had already had the opportunity of conversing at some length with Empress Eugénie when she had asked him to come to the Palais des Tuileries on 7 July 1867. Then she had made known her eagerness to see “wounded seamen, shipwrecked soldiers, and rescue vessels and crews of all nations, enjoy the benefits of the neutrality proclaimed by the Geneva Convention”.

On 20 August 1870, he wrote to impart to her a new project to take the Convention a step further:

Would not Your Imperial Majesty consider it of inestimable value to propose to Prussia the neutralization of a number of towns where the wounded could be sent? They would in this way be sheltered from the hazards caused by the fighting.

This suggestion did not bear fruit. But the idea behind it was sown, and several times belligerents were later able to set up security zones of this sort, where wounded men and refugees could shelter.

Dunant exerted so much activity and zeal that the French Government, which appeared at one time to have completely forgotten about the Geneva Convention, decided to publish its text. In particular, he multiplied his efforts to bring relief to the wounded. He actively took part in the despatch of ambulances by the French Society for the Relief of the Wounded towards the battlefields. As at Castiglione a dozen years before, he visited and brought comfort to the wounded transported back to Paris. He introduced the system of identification discs so that the dead might be identified, and busied himself with the question of granting belligerent status to irregular forces and mobile armed volunteers, who, he said, “wore tunics but no uniform, in order that they should not be shot as lawless armed peasants”. He was already seeking the acceptance of the protection of guerrilla troops.

During the *Commune*, Dunant displayed not only compassion, but also great bravery. With extraordinary courage, he rescued many victims from the claws of the Paris *Fédérés*, and risked his

life crossing the lines to intercede with Monsieur Thiers, in order to prevent excesses which he feared the Versaillais would commit.

Nevertheless, Dunant was the object of suspicion: who was this man? Was he a spy working for Germany, or was he a member of the “International”, one of those men whom all European Governments were seeking to arrest, imprison and execute? There was some confusion between the “International Working Men’s Associations” and the word “International” qualifying the work of the Red Cross organization. The police could hardly be expected to make such subtle distinctions!

* * *

Peace having been restored, Dunant, revolted by all the egoism and abjectness he had witnessed, sank once again into poverty. Like Don Quixote, but without his Rosinante and faithful squire, he sought wider horizons. His mind was full of grandiose projects; he could perceive how the world would be if conflicts could be settled by international authorities, on the basis of international law, before a high court of arbitration. For that, public opinion had to be educated, the range of thought extended and ideas directed towards the construction of peace.

He found it impossible to take up again the plan he had launched in 1866 for an international library. Hardly had the first publications appeared in Paris in 1869 when the war broke out. All that remained was a voucher for 100,000 francs which he never was able to cash.

The time and labour I spent were in vain.

Yet, the concept was fine . . .

Indeed, UNESCO’s day was dawning.

On the other hand, he became the itinerant advocate of two other big projects which he had nursed since 1866 at least: “The re-settlement of Palestine by the Jewish people” and the protection of prisoners of war. His programme for Palestine was so much in advance of his time, in its realism and prophetic intelligence, that it was understood by no one. The Zionists alone were to acclaim him as a pioneer, through the mouth of Theodore Herzl at the first Zionist Congress of 1897, in Basle.

Today, on the slopes around Jerusalem, a tree named after Henry Dunant grows in the midst of the forest dedicated to the

benefactors of mankind. Yet many of his ideas have not been carried out. They could no doubt constitute a basis for peaceful solutions to Middle East problems.

With regard to prisoners of war, Dunant had given some thought to this matter as early as 1863, before the first Diplomatic Conference; in 1867, he had drafted a report on the same subject to the Paris Conference. But his efforts did not produce any kind of response. Later, he took up the struggle again and founded a special committee in Paris. In June 1872, in a letter to his family from the French capital, he wrote:

Ah! if they only knew the difficulties and worries I have had, my anguish and sorrows, and my utter penury . . . Here I am now, President of the Standing International Committee formed to get a Convention accepted by all the civilized nations on the plight of prisoners of war.

As Paris was not ready to hear what he had to say, he went to London. At a meeting organized there, he was so faint from lack of food that he was not able to finish the address he was delivering. A few days later, though, we find him lecturing at Plymouth, presenting a plan for an international high court of arbitration: more seed thrown into the earth . . .

It was the beginning of two years of exhausting labour, stubborn determination and grinding poverty. The goal he set himself was to convene another diplomatic conference that would lay down provisions for the treatment of prisoners of war.

On 31 December 1873, he wrote to his family:

So many trials have not been in vain ; they cleanse us and prepare us for the Kingdom of God. But they are hard to bear ; not so much the physical hardships I have to endure and the fear of what the morrow might bring as the moral suffering I feel when I think of you and the cares, worries and troubles I bring upon you ; I do not speak of them, but sometimes I feel it is impossible to stand such despair any longer . . .

The Czar promised his support and encouraged the meeting of the Congress, with a proposal that Russia should be the inviting Power and that the Conference be held at Brussels in August 1874.

But the views of Alexander II and of his ministers did not coincide with those of Dunant, who wanted to extend the scope of the discussions and lay down provisions for “ a general settlement of international relations in time of war ”.

England's hostility will prevent the attainment of a diplomatic understanding between the European Powers, on this matter, he wrote.

A long time was to elapse, and many thousands of prisoners were to be thrown into camps during the First World War, before the convention sought by Dunant was at last signed in 1929!

At the congress, the discussions leaned towards the establishment of a law of war. Here are the results, as described by Dunant:

The congress will come to a close this week. I always opposed the Russians, because they want to lay down rules of war, wishing us to believe that the normal condition of mankind is to live in a perpetual state of war, while I and the Society for prisoners of war (like the Society for the wounded) wish to diminish the inevitable horrors of war, of that terrible plague upon which future generations will look back as a mad upheaval.

Dunant's intuition was so perfect that he never went wrong. Yes, indeed, a court of arbitration shall be set up; a convention for prisoners of war shall be signed; the Jews shall go back to Palestine; the immortal works of world literature shall be translated into all languages—but what an exhausting struggle has first to be fought!

* * *

One more date must be mentioned, after which Dunant's public career may be considered to have ended. On 1 February 1875, an international congress was organized in London for “ the full and definitive abolition of the sale of negroes and of the slave trade ”. It was convened by the “ Universal Alliance of Order and Civilization ”, created by Dunant in Paris and later in London, just after the 1870 war. In working for the most pitiable of all his fellow-creatures, Dunant was uttering the last of his appeals to the conscience of men to heed the suffering of mankind.

The wandering years began, ten years of abject poverty. Like any tramp, he trudged through Alsace, Germany, Italy, living on the charity, occasionally on the hospitality, of a handful of friends. One of these, Mrs. Kastner, until her death in 1888, gave him her support, despite the attacks and slanders which continued to be flung at him, even in his retirement. He was continually pursued by jealousy and spite.

It will take some considerable time before the studies currently being made will throw an accurate light on Dunant's intellectual activity during this period of his life. We shall restrict ourselves, for the moment, to considering the fruits of that activity at Heiden, at the end of his span of life, in the radiance of a capacity of thought brought to full maturity, the thought of a genius transcending the struggles, hopes and vicissitudes of his time, in order to propose to the world the only possible solutions that could ensure its survival when, out of the titanic confrontations of the twentieth century, mankind awakens to the unity and solidarity of human beings and gives birth at last to Peace.

What an extraordinary existence was Dunant's! First, thirty-four years of a life of inner preparation, of study, of meditation, of activities quietly carried out without any external show, followed by five years, from the publication of *Un Souvenir de Solférino* to the bankruptcy of the *Crédit Genevois*, of celebrity and success; and then twenty-eight years of poverty, wandering and seclusion, ending with fifteen years of renown, during which he never quitted his room in Heiden's hospital.

Henry Dunant died on 30 October 1910. It would not be correct to speak of his death as an ending. It would seem rather that his spirit has been released to act still more, throughout the whole world. He continues to arouse in men a vocation, to serve as an example, to rescue the suffering. Dunant's action is every day repeated, in countless places, where men and women tend human beings in distress, caring not where they are from or under whom they serve, but only for the nature of their suffering.

