

Switzerland

The official ceremony to commemorate the Centenary of the Swiss Red Cross took place on June 11, 1966 at the « Fraumünster » in Zurich as part of the 81st Ordinary Meeting of delegates which began the following day. More than 400 persons attended, including representatives of the Federal authorities, of the city of Zurich, of the Red Cross international institutions, of National Societies from neighbouring countries as well as delegates from organizations well disposed towards the Red Cross.

The first speech, preceded and followed by a musical interlude, was by the President of the Swiss Red Cross, Professor A. von Albertini¹.

The Centenary of the Red Cross was celebrated in Geneva on September 1, 1963. This important event, attended by representatives from many countries, was organized by the three Red Cross institutions in Switzerland, which worked in close co-operation, namely: the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies, and the Swiss Red Cross.

For this reason, the Swiss Red Cross then decided to celebrate its own centenary in 1966 in modest style.

Mr. von Albertini recalled the origins of the movement, and then he paid a tribute to those who, on July 17, 1866, founded the Swiss Red Cross: General H. G. Dufour and Federal Councillor J. Dubs. He concluded his address as follows:

I have merely recounted the first years of our institution in order once again to call to mind those outstanding men to whose initiative we owe the existence of this henceforth world-wide Red Cross movement and of our Swiss Red Cross. Today we are profoundly grateful for what they created. Our gratitude goes out once again in the first place to the prime mover in this work, Henry Dunant, in whose spirit was born the desire to bring about a great humanitarian movement, a desire so intense and imperious that it had to be satisfied. But our

¹ *Plate*: Centenary of the Swiss Red Cross; Mr. von Albertini delivering an address.

thanks also go to the founders of our own Society who proved themselves able to accomplish the tasks confronting them by directing their efforts to meet situations created by conditions prevailing in our country.

The Red Cross has appreciably changed its structure and efficiency in the course of the last century and these changes have always been designed to broaden the scope of its action and to introduce improvements. But its nucleus, the basic idea, the idea of the Red Cross as conceived by Henry Dunant on the battle-field at Solferino, has remained the same. This idea, the sacred flame from which the Red Cross arose is as active as ever.

The next speaker, Federal Councillor H. P. Tschudi, described the close ties linking Switzerland and the Red Cross :

The anniversary which we are celebrating today should remind each one of us that we can all contribute to the cause of peace by spreading the ideas of the Red Cross and, what is more, by practical action consistent with that spirit. Three years ago, during the Centenary of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Federal Councillor Wahlen stated that the idea and work of the Red Cross were the greatest gift our country ever gave to humanity. If it were necessary for our little State of Switzerland to justify its existence, this movement and its faithful administration for over more than a century, for the benefit of all people on earth, would alone be sufficient justification.

In his outline of the various tasks undertaken by the Swiss Red Cross for the benefit of the Swiss population, Mr. Tschudi showed that services by official assistance institutions have to be administered according to well defined and strict rules. On the other hand, private charity is adapted more realistically to actual circumstances so that a satisfactory social system can be founded. Activities by official and private institutions should be adapted to each other. The Swiss Red Cross is aware of this necessity. Its relations with the central, cantonal and local authorities can be considered as exemplary.

After describing the most important activities, such as voluntary medical aid, blood transfusion service for military and civilian needs, the training of professional nurses both male and female, Mr. Tschudi concluded :

An anniversary should not be merely a pretext to look back upon the past and to be thankful. Its importance lies in the stimulus it gives to all participants and to all responsible people to consider future tasks and preparation for the future. I am firmly convinced that you will apply yourselves to your new duties with the same initiative which has already proved so invaluable and that you will always rise to the occasion, whatever demands confront you. The tasks will not diminish so long as sickness are widespread throughout the world and continue to claim each day their constant crop of victims. In our own country too, events may occur which require intervention by the Red Cross to relieve the population affected. Even technical progress, the aims of which should be to benefit mankind, brings new perils in its wake.

The Federal Council has charged me to convey to you, on the occasion of your Centenary, its most sincere thanks and its warmest wishes for your future activity. I urge you to continue your work in the spirit of the founder of the Red Cross, our fellow countryman Henry Dunant, and to hand on to the coming generation your high ideal of dedication and understanding among the nations. In our well regulated society, in which youth's ardour may sometimes not find outlets, it can, within the Red Cross, find ample scope to put its potential enthusiasm to good use. What greater contribution to the rich fullness of life can exist than helping to alleviate the misery and suffering of others? That is why the Centenary of the Red Cross, like its beginning, is a response to Christ's words: "Go and do thou likewise".

It fell to Mr. J. Pictet, ICRC Director for General Affairs, to address the meeting on the subject: "Red Cross Principles".

The XXth International Conference of the Red Cross, in Vienna, in October 1965, solemnly proclaimed the charter of fundamental principles governing the universal Red Cross movement. This was an event of considerable moment. As it almost coincided in time with the Swiss Red Cross Centenary celebration, it seems to me appropriate to make it my subject for today.

The Red Cross movement was born of a high ideal. But as its work involves action of a practical kind, often improvised, there is a great risk that in haste to help, despite the pureness of intention, there might

be a straying from the guiding lines and unanimity might be found wanting.

Moreover, the Red Cross takes root in a diversity of soils throughout the world. National Societies are very different one from another ; each has its own features. Some, like the Swiss Red Cross, have a hundred years experience, others have hardly seen the light of day. Not all National Societies have an identical activity or programme.

Only the Red Cross doctrine therefore is the true bond uniting these Societies ; it is the mortar which makes fast the bricks to ensure a sturdy construction ; it is the source of unity and universality on which the institution's existence depends. Without its principles, the Red Cross would simply not exist. It was therefore an imperious necessity that the Red Cross should possess a clear doctrine founded on solid grounds.

The speaker went on to show how the Red Cross was able to frame these principles at the very time when ideologies clash in opposition to each other.

. . The upheaval of the First World War opened a new era in the history of human relations. This neo-barbaric epoch in which we now live was from its outset marked by a veritable overthrow of values and a profound confusion of ideas. People then began to speak differently ; they no longer attributed the same meaning to words. That is why it was of vital importance for the Red Cross to possess its own reliable and specific doctrinal basis. It had to know clearly what it was, where it was going and in what it believed.

But, for the success of this enterprise, the doctrine had to be such that men of all opinions could subscribe to it, whether they were idealists or realists, believers or non-believers. This required a universal language, release from the trammels of preconceived ideas and the blinkers of conventionalism. The Vienna Declaration is the offspring of modern thought which urges the seeker to explore himself and the civilization of which he is a member, in order to find solutions valid for the greatest number because they respond fully to human nature, rather than diverse formulas of limited scope.

The doctrine of the Red Cross is perennial. It is the expression of far-sighted wisdom, unaffected by the waxing and waning of fashion

and transient ideologies. It will outlive those who elaborated it and its immutability is perhaps a sign of its superiority over all passing phases in the history of mankind.

After analysing the principles of humanity and impartiality which, strictly speaking are the golden rules of Red Cross action, Mr. Pictet expounded on two further precepts—neutrality and independence—whose object is to inspire throughout the world that confidence in the Red Cross which is indispensable. Three other fundamental principles dealt with by the speaker are of an institutional character. He concluded by saying :

Such is the Charter adopted by the Red Cross for its second century. May it abide by it faithfully and find therein a source of strength to face future trials.

In the evening, after the official ceremony, at a banquet at the " Casino Zürichhorn ", the guests were addressed by the president of the Zurich branch as well as by representatives of Zurich cantonal and city councils. The presidents or delegates of the Austrian, French, German Federal Republic, Italian, and Liechtenstein National Societies then delivered messages of greetings and good wishes to the Swiss Red Cross.

The next day the General Meeting was held. After the routine procedure, Mr. Hans Haug, Secretary-General, read a paper on " The Direction taken by Swiss Red Cross Development ". We look forward to publishing this, for it throws light on a National Society's evolution and its place in the life of the nation in which it was born.

Mr. F. Siordet and Mr. H. Beer, for the two Red Cross international institutions, the ICRC and the League, spoke on the role of the Swiss Red Cross on the international and national levels and its part in humanitarian actions in many countries.

The commemorative events were concluded with a boat trip on the lake of Zurich. Mindful of the magnificent achievements of the past century, the Swiss Red Cross looks confidently to the future.