

The International Committee of the Red Cross at Geneva : one of the many humanitarian activities of Switzerland

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A splendid suggestion of another way to help has been made recently, which we feel will appeal to the ladies of our colony. We wish to ask our fair compatriots to knit socks and pullovers for men; babies' clothing, cardigans, mittens, etc. Every contribution, no matter how small, is greatly appreciated. Please forward such goods to : Mrs. W. Schmid, P.O. Box 386, Wellington, C.1.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SWISS CONSULATE AT
WELLINGTON, P.O. BOX 386.

NACHRICHTEN DES SCHWEIZERISCHEN KONSULATS IN
WELLINGTON, P.O. BOX 386.

The Swiss Consulate at Wellington is greatly interested in receiving clippings of any New Zealand newspapers and magazines, bearing on any Swiss topics, not including, of course, cable and radio news which appears through the whole New Zealand press.

The members of the Swiss Benevolent Society of New Zealand and other readers are requested to kindly mail any clippings of the described nature to the Consulate of Switzerland, which will greatly appreciate such help. Postage will be refunded by return mail.

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Das Schweizerische Konsulat in Wellington ist den Mitgliedern des Schweizerischen Wohltätigkeitsgesellschaft in Neuseeland sowie anderen Landsleuten und Lesern dankbar fuer die Zustellung von jeglichen Zeitungsartikeln in neuseelaendischen Tages-, Wochen- und Monatszeitungen und Zeitschriften ueber die Schweiz oder schweizerische Dinge, fuer welche es grosses Interesse hat. Ausgenommen sind natuerlich die ueblichen Telegramm- und Radionachrichten aus der Schweiz, welche in allen Tages-zeitungen erscheinen. Portospesen werden den Einsendern umgehend verguetet.

ONE OF THE MANY HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES OF SWITZERLAND.

The International Committee of the Red Cross
at Geneva.

During the last war, a learned French writer, Rémy de Gourmont, asked in one of his articles what was the meaning and origin of the mysterious sign of the Red Cross - about which nobody knew anything.

The work of the Red Cross, the 75th anniversary of which was celebrated this year, was founded by the first Convention of Geneva (22nd August 1864). The first steps had been taken by a resident of Geneva, a plain citizen who had chanced to be present at the battle of Solferino in 1859 and had seen the frightful state of the wounded, who died of thirst and infection in that hot countryside. Dunant had published in 1862 his "Souvenir de Solferino", a small volume written for a few chosen readers. (Dunant personally sent it to a few European sovereigns). In this he related simply what he had seen after this deadly battle, what he had done, with ridiculous material to help the unfortunate sufferers, and what should be done to improve the medical service with the help of doctors and civilian helpers. The Swiss Commander-in-Chief, General Dufour was a member of the first committee of five persons, all from Geneva, which organised the two international conferences which were the genesis of the Convention of Geneva held in 1864. Gustave Moynier was for 47 years the

king-pin or the organisation, Henri Dunant having had to withdraw in 1887 for private reasons. The Convention of Geneva of 1864, revised and added to on various occasions, organised the constitution of National Red Cross Societies in the various signatory countries. Little by little the number of members increased, till the Society spread over the whole world. The central organ for management and co-ordination was the International Committee, entirely composed of Swiss citizens and having its headquarters at Geneva. Some details follow about this central office, taken from an article by Mr. Jacques Chenevière, which he published shortly before the beginning of hostilities and which today is strikingly topical:

"The International Committee of the Red Cross is composed only of Swiss, who work gratuitously, as did the great founders. During the space of 75 years there have been only three presidents: Gustave Moynier, Gustave Ador and, today, Max Huber, former president of the Permanent Court of International Justice. This committee co-opts its members and may have as many as twenty-five. Their Swiss nationality makes them capable of preserving a spirit of neutrality and impartiality which they must steadily maintain and strengthen. Whatever may be their friendships or personal likes and dislikes, they must, in the service of the Red Cross, hear only the voice of humanitarian equity, without taking into account either nationalities, races, religions or political parties. The International Committee has learnt to submit to this discipline of spirit and of heart, so often difficult. Thus it can inspire confidence even in the excitement of conflicts. It knows that this confidence is the basis of its moral authority which is so slender, because it has neither political power nor great material means, and yet which is hardly ever contested. Now, the position of these few citizens of Geneva is most singular, even paradoxical - for they are called to act in the international plane, between belligerents, since it is in time of war or even of revolutionary conflict that the Committee's intervention is universally recognised as useful, even often indispensable. Distinct and in a way independent of the national Red Cross Societies, it is bound to all of them by the bonds of occasional collaboration and by a permanent and reciprocal smoothness of relations. Moreover, the national Societies grant it, along with their indispensable moral support, their financial aid. It renders an account of its doings to each International Conference of the Red Cross, attended by the representatives of all the Societies and of all the governments who have signed the Convention of Geneva. Moreover these conferences give it power to act in various matters. But, if it does work under the eye of the Red Cross Societies and with their co-operation, it nevertheless remains free. They wish it to be free. Likewise they prefer it to be composed only of Swiss. Several times, principally at the International Conferences of the Red Cross at Paris (1867), Berlin (1869), Karlsruhe (1887), and, after the Great War, at Geneva, in 1921, the question was asked whether the Committee would not be stronger by becoming more representative of the whole world through the addition of foreign members selected by the Red Cross Societies. Moynier himself raised this question. Each time, after a serious debate, it was thought wiser not to make any alteration in the established principle, strange as it may appear. The Red Cross Societies desired the "international" Committee to remain exclusively composed of Swiss, citizens of a country whose neutrality has always been "deliberately willed by the people and universally and officially recognised by other states." If the International Committee of the Red Cross possesses any moral power, that arises from the fact that no political influence can urge it on or restrain it. It is, in a word, under the guardianship of no government.

The Swiss composing the International Committee are fervent patriots, but they endeavour to serve the Red Cross as if it were another fatherland. The ideal strength of the Red Cross, especially in time of war, was willed and determined by the five founders of 1864.

The International Committee, called upon to take action between two hostile parties, has found that its fate is often to displease one of them for the time being, whilst the other praises it. If, for instance, it intervenes on behalf of prisoners of war, the state holding them may well become annoyed at first. But in a day or two this state will see the Committee of Geneva taking action for the benefit of its own subjects in the enemy's camp. So the friendship between the national societies and the International Committee remains set fair after the cloud has passed quickly over.

Switzerland understands that in case of war, her neutrality (if it is kept as it should be) will be an "active neutrality" aiming at the relief of others' suffering, and urged to action by brotherly love. The Swiss citizens who compose the International Committee of the Red Cross are also determined to uphold the tradition, the experience and also the inspiration of heart and reason. "

To complete these details about the work of the Red Cross, we extract a few paragraphs from an interesting article by Mr. Ed. Chapuisat in "Le Temps," of October 7, 1939. It has this significant title :

(Paris)

"An active neutrality".

"One might have thought that, once having finished its heavy task in Spain, the International Committee of the Red Cross could resume the investigations it is pursuing at the request of the diplomatic conferences with a view to increase still more the protection due to the work entrusted to the Red Cross. But dramatic events have arisen, pointing out to the Red Cross a further task. Once again it had to make immediate contact with the Red Cross Societies of the belligerent states and with the governments of these same states. With their consent, it had to dispatch its delegates to the battle-fields and call to its help the societies belonging to nations not involved in the conflict.

The Government of the Swiss Confederation has ordered the army to mobilise; but, at the same time, it has let it be understood that this mobilisation would be insufficient from the human point of view, if the Swiss people simply entrenched behind their machine-guns and their icy passes, if it appeared to remain indifferent to everything concerned with the present struggle; if, in short, it remained selfishly aloof from sufferings which, from day to day, grow in intensity, not far from its borders. Its sympathy certainly does grow deeper for these unfortunate victims of war. But since its duty as a neutral, which in the words of the treaties is recognised by the "whole of Europe", causes it to stand aloof from this terrible struggle, it wants its neutrality to be active. Switzerland is determined (and the Federal Council is unanimous on this point and in entire agreement with Switzerland) that the Red Cross, with its International Committee, ably presided over by Mr. Max Huber of Zurich, who is a former president of the Law Courts of the Hague, should proclaim the duties of Switzerland in everything pertaining to help for the wounded; in everything that pertains to the respect for international conventions concerned with prisoners of war, the respect due to civilian populations, the exchange of messages, so impatiently awaited by these prisoners; and, eventually, as was the case in 1914/1918, the exchange of badly wounded men or the internment in Switzerland of many thousands of wounded.

It is impossible, in these few lines, to summarise so many tasks, but they will perhaps show that Switzerland, if it does loyally do its military duty, intends also to remain faithful to a great tradition of mutual help and active sympathy.

OBITUARY :

The Swiss Benevolent Society extends to Mr. B.Schumacher and Family of Chudleigh Rd., Ngarua, its most sincere expressions of sympathy and regret on the death of his wife.

The late Mrs. Rosa Schumacher was the daughter of Mrs. Rosa Davis and the late Mr. Anton Z' Berg. She arrived in New Zealand with her parents when 8 years of age. She was also a niece of Mrs. J. Hagenbuch of Te Aroha.

Her husband, B. Schumacher, and his children, Albert, Frieda, Marie, Theresa, Rosa, Patricia, Benedict and Lina sadly mourn their loss. The youngest child was born about 5 months ago. Mrs. Schumacher was interred at Te Aroha on March 26th. 1940.

BUNDESFEIER BADGE for 1940.

We have just received from the Bundesfeier Committee a sample of the 1940 badge. It is a round bronze medal of about $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch diameter, depicting a mother and baby in arms, with marching soldiers led by the Swiss banner, as the background. The workmanship is excellent. It is really something out of the ordinary, and a beautiful memento of the first Bundesfeier of the present war. The price of the badge is 2/-. Please send your order as soon as possible, so as to give us an opportunity to order them in good time for the 1st. August. The Secretary will be pleased to receive orders.

NEWS IN BRIEF.

While searching for oil, a vein of coal of considerable size and good quality was discovered near Palézieux, Canton of Waadt. This find may lead to the discovery of oil which is expected to be found at a depth of approx. 1700 meters.

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Only two Ministers of the Swiss Confederacy held office longer than the late Mr. Motta. Schenk officiated for 31 years from 1864 till 1895 while Deucher was only one year behind the former. He held office from 1883 till 1912. These are wonderful records indeed.

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Concrete roads have proved their economic advantages and popularity. About 30 years ago the first strip of concrete road was laid down near Rorschach. By the end of 1939 Switzerland has a total of 1,130,670 square meters of such roads. Freiburg, Obwalden, Appenzell J. RH have no concrete roads yet.

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