



**A Summary of the Work  
of the  
BRITISH  
RED CROSS SOCIETY**

**HEADQUARTERS:**

**14 Grosvenor Crescent, London, S.W.1**

# THE BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY

**G**REAT BRITAIN was among the sixteen powers represented at the Conference of 1864 and was one of the early signatories to the Geneva Convention.

On August 8th, 1870, a few weeks after the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, an appeal appeared in the press from Colonel Loyd Lindsay, V.C. (afterwards Lord Wantage) for the formation of a National Aid Society, to care for sick and wounded soldiers, under the protection of the Red Cross. The appeal had an immediate success.

Queen Victoria became Patron of the new Society, the Prince of Wales became President of the Central Committee, Princess Christian and Florence Nightingale gave their services on the Ladies' Committee. In a little more than a month a fund, opened by the Lord Mayor of London, had collected £200,000, and English activity in conformity with the lately established Convention of Geneva, under the famous and beneficent emblem of the Red Cross began.

Between 1870 and the outbreak of the World War, the history of the British Red Cross—as the National Society was colloquially called from the first—was a history of voluntary service to the wounded in time of war, irrespective of their nationality. Within a month of its formation in 1870, forty doctors had been sent to care for the wounded, twenty going to the Prussian Army and twenty to the French. By the end of the war, personnel had risen to 200, and quantities of food, clothing, vehicles and medical and surgical stores had been sent.

After the war, part of the surplus funds of the Society was used for the training of women nurses at the Royal Victoria

Hospital, Netley, the beginning of the present Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. Help was given during the Turco-Servian War of 1876-7, the Russo-Turkish War which followed, the Zulu War, 1879, the Transvaal War, 1881, the Egyptian Expedition, 1882, the Soudan Campaign, 1884-5, the Servo-Bulgarian War, 1885-6, the Rhodesian Expedition, 1896, the Greco-Turkish War, 1897, the Soudan Campaign, 1898. In the South African War the Central Red Cross Committee, lately set up, supplied and ran two hospital trains, and a hospital ship, opened a number of big hospitals, privately furnished, and arranged for the supply of doctors, nurses and medical stores. In the Balkan War, 1912-13, the British Red Cross Society (formed by the fusion of the Central British Red Cross Council and the National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded in War, and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1908) sent medical assistance to each of the belligerents.

## The B.R.C.S. in the Great War

But it was in the Great War that the Red Cross performed its greatest service. From time to time, steps had been taken to place voluntary aid under the Red Cross in effective relation with the Army Medical Services, and after the War broke out, a Joint Committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John was officially recognised by the War Office.

Administered by this Joint War Committee, at a cost of £22,000,000 (known as "The Times Fund") the gigantic organisation then built up ran ambulances, hospitals, sanatoria, and aided in the transport of wounded and disabled men in every theatre of the war and at home; it searched for wounded and missing men, and set up hospitals for the incurably disabled, of which the Star and Garter Home at Richmond is a standing memorial. By the services of the Voluntary Aid Detachments, organised and trained before the war, thousands of men and trained nurses were released for service at the front, and thousands of members themselves served abroad.

Continued Work of the Joint War Committee may be summarised as under :

The majority of the Auxiliary Hospitals were closed as their soldier patients were discharged, but a certain number continued in operation as convalescent homes or special hospitals.

**The Auxiliary Hospitals for Officers Department** still maintains a few institutions for chronic cases and subsidises cases in sanatoria. 18,720 officers have been dealt with up to the present time.

**The Emergency Help Department** affords interim relief, pending the decision of claims upon the Ministry of Pensions, etc., to ex-Service men suffering from sickness or disablement considered to be attributable to or aggravated by their war service; similar aid is given to their widows and dependents.

**Ex-Service Pensioners in Hospital.** For the benefit of these men grants are made out of joint funds to provide additional comforts, drives, entertainments and ward industries.

**The Home Ambulance Service.** At the time of the Armistice a large number of ambulances which had worked abroad under the Joint War Committee were still effective, and it was decided to devote these to a Home Ambulance Service, which was accordingly set up in 1919, to provide a better means of transport for the sick and injured, more especially in country districts. The scheme was an immediate success, and has been considerably developed since its inauguration. The number of patients carried in the ambulances during 1937 was 161,840, making a total, since the service was set up in 1919, of 1,885,919.

This scheme includes the Mobile X-Ray Service, designed to provide the physician with facilities for conducting radiographic examinations of patients confined to bed. Although primarily intended for London, it has, on several occasions, rendered assistance as far afield as Cumberland.

**The Red Cross and St. John Hospital Library** serves all classes of hospital. In addition to Military Hospitals at home and abroad and Hospital Ships, General and Cottage Hospitals, Convalescent Homes, Infirmaries and Mental Institutions are

supplied with literature of all kinds contributed by a wide public. 347,582 books and magazines were distributed in 1937.

## The Central Bureau for Hospital Information

Set up in May, 1928, under the auspices of the British Hospitals Association and the Joint Bodies. It surveys the work and finance of the voluntary provincial hospitals and publishes an annual report with reference to the following features:—

- (a) Facilities available for treatment.
- (b) The extent to which they are utilised.
- (c) Annual cost of maintaining these facilities.
- (d) Sources and extent of the funds by which they are maintained.

The Bureau issues memoranda on matters of hospital importance, and undertakes enquiries at the request of individual hospitals, reducing the information received to usable form. A "Hospitals Year Book" is published, giving details of every aspect of hospital administration.

## The Supplemental Charter

After the war such a vast organisation could not be allowed to fall into inactivity, and it was decided to turn to peacetime uses those great services that had so benefited mankind in time of war. The Covenant of the League of Nations had recognised the value of the Red Cross, and by Article 25, engaged the members of the League:

"To encourage and promote the establishment and co-operation of duly authorised Red Cross Societies, having as purposes the improvement of health, the prevention of disease, and the mitigation of suffering throughout the world."

In 1919 a Supplemental Royal Charter was granted authorising the British Red Cross Society to add this peacetime work to its primary object of assisting the wounded in time of war.

As the meaning and scope of the Supplemental Charter became more fully understood, the B.R.C.S. slowly but surely evolved a wide programme of activities. The first object of the

Society: "To provide trained voluntary assistance to supplement the services of the State for the Sick and Wounded in time of War," still stands as its primary function and duty. But it is more and more clearly realised that training needs to find expression in practice, and efficiency is developed through the fulfilment of the second object: "To supplement the services provided by the State, Municipal Authorities and Hospitals for the prevention and alleviation of suffering at all times" freely and without charge.

**Organisation.** The unit of organisation is the Detachment. There are Men's Detachments and Women's Detachments, of which there are two categories—the Red Cross Detachment and the Voluntary Aid Detachment, with its two sub-divisions of "Mobile" and "Immobile" members. The training of both categories is the same, but while the Red Cross Detachment has no formal commitments under the War Office, the V.A.D. is governed by the regulations of the V.A.D. Council, and its members undertake obligations: (a) Mobile, to serve, in the event of war, anywhere at home or abroad as required; (b) Immobile, to serve as required in their own neighbourhoods.

**Training.** Both categories are required to take frequent and repeated courses of instruction, and to pass examinations in First Aid and Home Nursing. They are also invited and recommended to take courses in Cookery, Hygiene and Sanitation, Infant Welfare, Treatment of Tuberculosis, First Aid in Mines, and Anti-Gas Training and Tropical Hygiene. To ensure that an adequate standard of general efficiency is maintained, camps (including the National V.A.D. Training Camp), inspections, field days and competitions are held at regular intervals. The climax of the competitions is the Stanley Shield Contests (for men and women), held annually in London, after eliminating rounds in the counties.

**Air Raid Precautions.** Instruction in Anti-Gas Training for Members of Voluntary Aid Detachments was begun in 1933. With the development of a National Air Raids Precautions Scheme, the work has extended to the training of qualified Instructors recog-

nised by the Home Office as competent to instruct the general public, and to the formation of an A.R.P. Reserve of persons trained to assist in special emergency. At the end of 1937, nearly 29,000 members had qualified for certificates in anti-gas training and, in addition, 675 were fully qualified instructors.

## General Activities

**First Aid.** With the enormous increase of motor traffic there has been a parallel demand for First Aid Posts, or Patrols on the roads, and a large number of members give up their free time at week-ends and holidays to this activity. Such posts or patrols are indicated by a Red Cross flag, and liaison is established with the local Police, Ambulance and Hospital Services.

Personnel and equipment are provided by the local Detachments for First Aid Stations at Fêtes, Pageants, Race Meetings, Camps, Fairs Sports Grounds, Exhibitions, etc. Nurses are supplied for Guide Camps, Camp Hospitals, etc.

Many sea coast branches establish First Aid Tents on the beach at holiday resorts.

Undertakings of special interest are the Red Cross Dispensaries in the Kent hopfields, provided during the hop harvesting season (which is attended by many thousands of hoppers drawn mostly from the East End of London), by the County of London Branch and by the Kent Branch; and the Red Cross Dressing Station at Yarmouth, Norfolk, for the Scottish fisherfolk, who come there every autumn in thousands for the herring fisheries. The dispensaries are staffed by V.A.D. Members working under a trained nurse. Similar service is being extended to other areas of seasonal employment.

**Instruction in First Aid.** Qualified Red Cross Instructors are frequently asked to hold courses in first aid and home nursing for Scouts, Guides and others, who, recognising the value of a standardised certificate, wish to enter for the Society's examinations. This provides a most valuable opportunity for introducing the ideals and objects of the Red Cross into other organisations.

**Assistance at Local Hospitals; Home Nursing, etc.** The assistance of V.A.D. members is welcomed by many hospitals. Some volunteer for special service during depletion of the staff by holidays or sickness; some take regular auxiliary duty in one or other department; or assist with the clerical, appeal, stores or almoners' work. Some members hold themselves in readiness to undertake such cases of home nursing as they may be qualified to deal with, or to assist the District Nurses as called upon. In epidemics the existence of an organised voluntary service has repeatedly proved its value. In many localities working parties both of V.A.D. members and Working Associates are organised, and provide garments, bandages, and other hand-made hospital and nursing accessories. Out-patients' canteens are a valuable form of service.

**Physical Treatment.** As the number of ex-soldier patients diminished during the years following the war, many of the curative centres, which had been established at the request of the Ministry of Pensions, were gradually converted to civilian use—some exclusively for children, others for adults as well. These are all under the direction of experts, but members of Detachments find that the help that they are able to give—bandaging, and general assistance to patients and staff—provides them with interesting and valuable experience.

In the London area Clinics carry on this work, particularly for the benefit of those who cannot afford expensive courses of treatment, a feature being that evening sessions allow of attendance after working hours. All are equipped and staffed to administer up-to-date forms of treatment. The number of patients increases every year.

Several County Branches have established country clinics at places sufficiently near to each other to share the advantages of medical supervision and the whole-time services of a nurse, but sufficiently separate to provide each with a centre on which the surrounding villages can converge. Such clinics, though not confined to the treatment of children, are especially valuable in rural districts where the minor disabilities of children can be



rectified at an early age, when they are readily susceptible to treatment. They work in connection with orthopædic hospitals, and in co-operation with the Schools Medical Service.

**Children's Welfare Centres, Day Nurseries, School Treatment Centres.** In districts where Infant and Child Welfare is not fully dealt with by the local Health or Education Authorities, the B.R.C.S. has established Welfare Centres, Day Nurseries, or School Treatment Centres. These again are under the direction of experts, but Detachment members find in them a delightful and useful opportunity for using their training and of gaining experience along many lines. V.A.D. members also give their services in welfare centres other than those organised by the Society.

**In addition to Members of Detachments** there are subscribing Members and Associates. Life Members are those who make a grant of £5 5s. Members pay not less than 5s. annually. Associates are those who pay less than 5s. but not less than 2s. 6d. Working Associates are organised in groups, and undertake to aid the Society by raising funds or by service that comes within the scope of its activities, other than that requiring trained personnel.

**Medical Supply Depots.** A most useful and highly appreciated service is the provision of Medical Supply Depots where sick room requisites can be hired at a small rate, or may, in necessitous cases, be lent free of charge. A large number of these exist, and it is not possible to over-estimate the comfort and relief thus afforded to the sick and those who minister to them. The maintenance of the depots and their stores in good order, and the issue and checking of loans, entails constant attention and a great deal of regular and sustained effort.

Bath chairs, crutches and surgical appliances are in many instances provided.

There are other important forms of service for the promotion of health and the relief of suffering which are not dependent on Detachments, but come within the scope of the Red Cross.

**Health Lectures.** The Health Lecture Department organises Lecture Courses and Tours in all parts of the country, particularly in rural and slum areas, with the object of spreading knowledge of the simple rules of healthy living, dental hygiene, food values, prevention of infection, mothercraft, etc. These are frequently associated with "Health Weeks," organised by the local authority, for which Red Cross posters and other literature bearing on Red Cross activities are supplied.

**Blood Transfusion.** In a number of counties, the Red Cross has instituted a local branch of the Blood Transfusion Service in conjunction with the hospitals. Many of the volunteers come from such organisations as the Rover Scouts, Y.M.C.A. and Toc H. The central organisation, in London, is in the hands of a sub-Committee of the Red Cross, the British Hospitals Association and the various associations of donors. It is claimed that in London it rarely takes more than half an hour to get a donor to the patient requiring the transfusion.

**Treatment of Rheumatism.** A new departure of great importance is the initiation of a campaign against rheumatism. Investigation during recent years has shown that nearly one-sixth of industrial invalidity in this country is due to rheumatic disease, with consequent very serious loss to the workers, the Approved Societies, and to industry at large.

In 1927 the Approved Societies, the Trade Unions and the British Committee on Rheumatism jointly approached the British Red Cross Society to build and equip, in London, a Central Clinic for the investigation, diagnosis and treatment of chronic rheumatism.

The British Red Cross Society agreed to engage in this campaign and to build and equip the first clinic. It is intended for the benefit and relief of the mass of men and women suffering from rheumatic conditions who are able and willing to pay a reasonable fee for treatment, and for the industrial worker who can receive treatment and continue his employment in a normal manner. Under the Health Insurance Acts, Approved Societies

are enabled to pay capitation rates for the treatment of insured patients.

The Clinic was opened on February 25th, 1930, by Her Majesty Queen Mary.

It is situated in Peto Place, Marylebone Road, London, and is easily accessible from all parts of the metropolis. It provides for every approved form of treatment, which can be administered to 300 or 400 patients daily, by a staff of fully qualified attendants, under the direction of the medical staff. It provides, also, facilities for research. During 1937, 90,884 attendances were made in the general patients' department and 7,949 in the private patients' department.

## Junior Red Cross

The Junior Section is an integral part of the national Red Cross Society in 50 countries throughout the world. In Great Britain it exists mainly as a voluntary movement in schools, but is also incorporated, by means of its "link" system, in other juvenile organisations. Its aim is to co-operate with teachers and others interested in the training of boys and girls, in those matters with which the Red Cross is particularly concerned, namely, the development of a "health conscience" service to the sick and suffering, and international co-operation.

It encourages among children the formation of healthy habits of living, and develops the child's sense of social responsibility by means consistent with youth, through a definite but elastic programme of activities, that can be readily adapted to local conditions and varying types of schools and groups. Instruction for the Junior Red Cross Certificates in First Aid and Home Nursing is open to our own members and to groups other than registered Links. These standardised courses, given by Red Cross Members qualified as Instructors, are much appreciated and are a valuable means of liaison with other juvenile organisations such as Scouts, Guides, Girls' Guildry, Boys' and Girls' Brigades, Clubs, etc. For the younger children there is a primary course dealing with personal hygiene and the simple emergencies of daily life.

The source of inspiration for all the activities of the Junior Branch is drawn from the history and high tradition of the Red Cross, so that a younger generation is growing up grounded in its ideals of service.

## Abyssinia

Medical assistance was offered to both belligerents in the Italo-Abyssinian War. The Italian Government declined the offer as they had ample medical resources of their own. The Society absorbed the British Ambulance Service in Ethiopia Committee and sent badly needed medical services to work with the Abyssinian forces. Public support was most generous, enabling two Units to be sent.

The first, a mechanised Unit, after doing valuable work, was bombed near Lake Ashangi and withdrew to Addis Ababa to refit. The collapse of the Abyssinian Army followed and in the subsequent rioting Dr. Melly, the Unit's leader, met his death in tragic circumstances. His gallant conduct was recognised by the posthumous award of the Albert Medal. On the Italian occupation of Addis Ababa the Unit left Abyssinia.

The second Unit, a smaller body, with mule transport, had only a very brief career in Abyssinia as its arrival at Gondar was followed almost immediately by the Italian occupation and the consequent recall of the Unit.

## Spain

The International Red Cross Committee, shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, issued an appeal to national Red Cross Societies for funds to relieve the sick and wounded, and to render such succour as circumstances might permit to the distressed civilian population. An appeal was made by the British Red Cross Society and funds as available were forwarded to the Committee and purchases of such articles as blankets, shirts and boots have been made in this country for despatch to Spain. A special appeal to the Junior Red Cross for clothing resulted in a considerable quantity of garments being received.

The funds at the disposal of the International Red Cross Committee now being considerably reduced, its activities in Spain of necessity have been curtailed and a considerable portion of its work in connection with prisoners and enquiries, emanating from Great Britain, has been carried out by the Society since the beginning of 1938.

## China

At the outbreak of hostilities the International Red Cross Committee addressed the customary enquiry to both belligerents as to whether medical assistance would be acceptable. The Japanese Red Cross declined as being suitably provided. China asked for all possible assistance, and towards meeting this need an appeal was issued by the British Red Cross Society and steps were taken to co-operate with other interested organisations—The China Association and the Conference of British Missionary Societies. As the extent of the war became apparent, the Lord Mayor of London issued a national appeal for the Fund thus formed under the title of “The Lord Mayor’s Fund for the Relief of Distress in China.”

A Committee to administer the Fund was formed in this country, and to administer the money and material sent to China a Committee under the Presidency of the British Ambassador was set up at Shanghai.

Over £100,000 has been received in the Fund to date, and together with contributions in kind, such as medical supplies, drugs, anaesthetics and blankets and clothing, has been sent to China.

The work of the Fund still continues, and further contributions must be received if its work is to be maintained.

REPORT OF THE PROGRESS  
of the  
COLONIAL AND OVERSEAS BRANCHES  
since 1930

The British Empire Conference of 1930 recorded the hope that the Council of the British Red Cross Society would use "every endeavour to stimulate the formation of local and Central Council Branches throughout the Empire," and was of opinion that "it is eminently desirable that co-operation should be established with existing health and welfare centres in the different localities, and that the affiliation of such agencies to the Red Cross should be invited whenever circumstances allow."

Since that date Central Council Branches have been formed in Kenya, the Gold Coast, Southern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Swaziland, Seychelles and Ceylon.

The urgent need for maternity and child welfare work and for improved health education has been a determining factor in the formation of many Branches. The Red Cross, wherever possible, co-operates with existing agencies, such as the East African Women's League in Kenya and the Gold Coast League for Maternity and Child Welfare.

**Ceylon.** Red Cross work in Ceylon began in 1935, and after a little over two years excellent results have been obtained. In 1937 the membership was greatly increased, and local branches and Voluntary Aid Detachments were formed. There are now 17 local branches with a total membership of over 1,200, and there is every indication that the activities of the Branch will be still further extended.

**The Gold Coast.** The progress of the Gold Coast Branch, backed by the enthusiasm of Africans and Europeans alike, has produced remarkable results, including the construction of a new Isolation Ward at the Accra Maternity Hospital, assistance for the sufferers in the Leper Settlements by the frequent supplies of

books, blankets, clothes, etc., Welfare Centres at Cape Coast and Sekondi in charge of the Red Cross Health Sisters, the installation of X-ray plant in the hospital at Kumasi and extensive public health propaganda.

Much attention has been bestowed on the development of the Junior Branch—which was first introduced in the upper grade and training schools—with very satisfactory results. Junior First Aid and Home Nursing classes have been introduced and are popular, the African Junior showing great aptitude in the practice of First Aid.

**Kenya.** At Nairobi, a Red Cross Room fitted up as a hospital ward, has been opened by the East African Women's League for courses of lectures and demonstrations. There are now so many persons holding certificates that it is proposed to form detachments. Lectures founded on the Junior Courses are given at the Jeanes School, a centre for the training of African teachers.

Lectures in Anti-Gas Training are being given and Classes for First Aid are being extended. Practical application of the training is made at Red Cross Tents provided at various functions.

Red Cross funds assist the Clinic at Nakuru for African babies.

**Seychelles.** The Branch holds classes for First Aid, Home Nursing and Hygiene, which are well attended.

The members of the local Branch help in the hospitals at Victoria and Praslin, also at the Infant Welfare, Ante-natal and Venereal disease clinics at Victoria.

**Southern Rhodesia.** Centres for training have been established in Matabeleland, in Mashonaland and in Manicaland. An excellent start has been made with Junior Red Cross. A useful little supplement to the Junior Health Manual, appropriate to tropical conditions, has been written and published by the Branch. Links have been registered in all types of schools. Courses in First Aid are being taken, especially in boys' schools and by older boys.

**Sudan.** Red Cross work in the Sudan is making steady progress and there is an encouraging increase in the numbers of those attending for instruction and practice. Centres are established at Khartoum, Port Sudan and Wad Medani. It is hoped that a start may soon be made towards Junior Red Cross work.

**Swaziland.** The need for maternity and child welfare work is urgent and it is hoped to form, at each Government post, a centre for Red Cross instruction.

In the Central District of the Protectorate work in native clinics at the Mission Hospital, Bemersdorp is carried out, and classes for European mothers in Infant Welfare, Home Nursing and Child Psychology are held at the Railway Institute, Bemersdorp. Classes are also held for European mothers at Stegi.

The work is having a definite effect in improving the health of the native mothers and children, and is one of the best modes of health propaganda and has earned the recognition of the Government.

31/5/38.