INTER ARMA CARITAS

The Work of the International Committee of the Red Cross during the second World War

SECOND EDITION - GENEVA 1973
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PREFACE

The International Committee of the Red Cross will present to the Seventeenth International Red Cross Conference, which will be held at Stockholm in August 1948, a detailed General Report on the whole of its activities in the course of the second World War and during the immediate post-war period.

The Committee considers, however, that, without awaiting the appearance of that comprehensive record, it should give National Red Cross Societies, Governments, the public, and all who have given it practical or moral support, a short account of its work and the conditions under which this was done. The Committee has therefore decided to publish at once this short and simple pamphlet, written by M. Frédéric Siordet, adviser to the International Committee. Of the attempts made to relieve the distress caused by the most terrible cataclysm which ever ravaged the world, the detailed Report, however long—a fortiori this little book—can reveal one aspect only.

Like each of the National Societies, the International Committee is but one of the instruments of something greater than any of them: the idea of the Red Cross. The fundamental work of the Red Cross in war-time, the work on the "battle-front" of suffering, is done first and chiefly by the National Societies, in the field dressing-stations or in the hospitals of the interior, in the ruins of bombed cities or in hungry villages, wherever war hurts man in his flesh. The International Committee, for its part, is the means, often the only means, by which this relief can cross the battle-line.

A full idea of what the Red Cross was able to do can only be gained by reading the reports which the National Societies have already published or will publish in the future, above all by
reading between the lines the whole story of perseverance, daring, heroism and sacrifice which lies hidden behind each of their undertakings.

If then, in the pages which follow, the National Societies or the League of Red Cross Societies are mentioned only occasionally, this is not due to any desire to belittle their work in order to magnify that of the International Committee. As, after a battle, a historian may devote himself to the study of the part taken in the fight by some one section of the army or the staff, without thereby ascribing to it greater merit than it deserves, so it seems worth while to examine the particular work which, from day to day, the International Committee has found itself called upon to undertake.
CHAPTER I

A DEED AND AN IDEA

"Eight thousand visits to prisoners of war and internment camps. Thirty-six million parcels transported and distributed in the camps. Twenty-three and a half million civilian messages. News of prisoners of war given to their families, or vice versa, a hundred and twenty million times".

"Yes, but what about the Soviet prisoners of war, and the people in the concentration camps? What did you do for them?"

***

Now that hostilities have ceased, questions are being asked about the activity of the Red Cross in general and of the International Committee in particular. Did the Committee really do all it could? Did it not fail to perform some of its duties? Is it to be judged by its achievements or by its failures?

The General Report on the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross during the second World War, which will be presented to the 1948 International Red Cross Conference, will make it possible perhaps, with the passage of time, to answer these questions. Yet if it is easy to evaluate a report of work done by a business concern or an administration, because its legal position, its functions and its resources are
clearly defined, it is less simple in the case of an organism like the International Committee of the Red Cross, in which the various elements are ill-defined and usually little known.

In giving a brief account of the Committee's work therefore, it seems necessary, even before the General Report appears, to describe the position which the Committee occupies in law and in the Red Cross as a whole.

If we confine our attention to the part played by the International Committee, it is not because of any failure to appreciate what was done for war victims by the National Red Cross Societies or other welfare organizations, official or private. Moreover, what we have to study is not so much the work of the organ itself as the work which the Red Cross was able to do by using it as an intermediary agent.

What then is this International Committee, so recently almost forgotten, to which, once war had broken out, millions of people suddenly turned, as to an all-powerful super-state, a supernatural power or, on the contrary, a universal agent, ready to perform any kind of service?

It is not all-powerful. At the risk of provoking final condemnation in the minds of some, let it be said at the outset that it has not in its power to prevent war. Nor can it hinder war from following its inevitable course. The Red Cross has no means of preventing guns killing or fire destroying. It cannot turn folly into wisdom, cruelty into kindness or hate into love. If that is what was required of it, it has failed.

What then is the Committee?

Let us go back to 1859, to the Italian campaign, to Solferino. There, beneath a leaden sky soon to dissolve in a downpour of rain, two mighty armies were suddenly locked in one of the bloodiest conflicts in history. The carnage went on for fifteen hours. The battle-field was covered with dead; there were tens of thousands of wounded, doomed to die in their turn for lack of attention. There were too many. The hospitals of the neighbouring towns, still occupied by men wounded in previous battles, were full to overflowing. So too were the movable field-hospitals. A few people of the district, chiefly women, gave
unstinting aid. But what could they do, without medica-
ments or bandages?

Passing through Solferino, a tourist, Henry Dunant of
Geneva, witnessed this scene of horror. He was greatly moved.
He bent over a wounded man, over another, and another. He
continued thus for days, for weeks, without repose. Realizing
the scale of the disaster and the total inadequacy of the help
that was being improvised, he tried to organize relief. Preaching
by example, he roused people of goodwill, formed them into
groups, allotted them their tasks. He informed his friends in
Switzerland and elsewhere, and begged for medical supplies.
But above all, he created a new spirit: surprised at first, then
won over, the women who had preferred to succour those
whom they considered their liberators, learned from Dunant
that suffering has no nationality, but is merely human, and
began to tend the enemy wounded as well.

When he returned to Geneva, Dunant was haunted by
these events. The memory of those tens of thousands of wound-
ed made him think of other tens and hundreds of thousands, all
those of future wars, who would also die for lack of attention.
What he had tried to do showed him what might be done.
They had saved three thousand men, five thousand perhaps.
But there had been forty thousand! How many might not have
been saved if the service which had been given spontaneously
or in response to his appeals, had been organized beforehand,
and if medical equipment and supplies had been forthcoming.

Then he wrote “A Memory of Solferino”. In it he related
what he had seen and what the women of Solferino and Casti-
glione had done. He portrayed the horror and the sublimity of
the morrow of battle. He ended with two suggestions. Would
it not be possible, in peace-time, to form societies whose aim
would be to see that the wounded were cared for in war-time?
And was it not desirable that a Congress should formulate some
international principle, embodied in a convention and accepted
as sacred, which should serve as a basis for these societies?

This little book, sent at first only to the author’s friends and
a few people of importance, was to go round the world. It was
to give birth to a double event: an international Convention and a world-wide movement for charity in war; in other words, to the Red Cross.

Yet what Dunant did, others had done before him. His idea of neutrality in the presence of suffering was not entirely new. Beginning with Cyrus, King of Persia, in B.C. 550, history reveals many cases of kings or generals who ordered their troops to care for the enemy wounded, and of bilateral agreements by which two belligerents, at the outbreak or in the course of hostilities, pledged themselves to respect each other's hospitals, doctors and wounded or sick soldiers. It abounds in stories of individual or collective service done to help those wounded in war. Dunant himself, still impressed by the quite recent achievement of Florence Nightingale, quotes many examples in which he seeks encouragement for his ideas. As for his two suggestions, in the form in which he wrote them, they seem like a pious wish, almost naive, hardly more than the cry of "It ought not to be allowed", which springs from sensitive hearts.

Why this success? Because the development of ideas, by spreading belief in the value of the individual, had prepared the ground? No doubt, but also, and especially, because Dunant's idea was not an isolated idea: behind it was the deed done by the author himself. Moreover, the latter, having conceived the idea, put himself entirely at its service, in order to make it the motive power of other deeds, similar but on a larger scale, better organized, more efficacious. By pen and by word of mouth he renewed, he prolonged the deed. He set before men's eyes, together with the wounded of the Italian campaign, all the wounded of future campaigns. And as at Solferino he called forth service, organized relief and allotted tasks, so now he roused pity for the wounded of the future, and compelled men to bend over them, as on the battle-field he had compelled lookers-on to add their efforts to his own.

At Geneva, as soon as the manuscript of the book was read, his friends were fired with enthusiasm. The matter was
brought before the Welfare Society, who appointed a committee, composed of their chairman Gustave Moynier, General Dufour, Dr. Appia, Dr. Maunoir and Henry Dunant, to study the latter's suggestions and if possible, to give effect to them.

Such was the zeal of Moynier and his colleagues, such Dunant's powers of persuasion as he travelled about Europe to plead his cause, that on October 29 of the following year, 1863, this modest "Geneva Committee for Aid to Wounded Soldiers" was able to assemble an informal international Conference representing sixteen nations; and a year later the Swiss Federal Council, won over to the new ideas, called together another conference, this time of diplomatists. The first approved the Geneva Committee’s proposals and decided on the formation, in all the countries represented, of national societies for aid to wounded soldiers; the second resulted in the signing, by the plenipotentiaries of twelve European States, of the Geneva Convention of August 22, 1864 "for the Relief of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field". For the first time in history a multilateral treaty proclaimed in advance, and permanently —no longer only on the occasion of a particular conflict—the neutralization of field dressing-stations and military hospitals and of medical staff, and the obligation to care for wounded and sick soldiers without distinction of nationality. An international symbol was created which conferred legal protection even on the battle-field: a red cross on a white ground.

Two years had sufficed for the "Would it not be possible?" and the "Is it not desirable?" written by Dunant at the end of his book, to be translated into acts in the life of nations and into principles of international law.

Such is the power of faith.
CONCERNING A LOCAL COMMITTEE FOR AID TO THE WOUNDED

The Red Cross was born. It had two parts, separate but complementary, corresponding to Dunant's two suggestions: an international Convention, and Committees for aid to the wounded. The purpose assigned to the Committee of Five being thus achieved, was this organism to be dissolved, or at best to restrict its activity to that of a local committee for aid to wounded soldiers, that is to say, in a neutral country like Switzerland, to almost nothing? No; the 1863 Conference had considered it the originator of the idea, and now it was to remain its guardian.

A principle "embodied in a Convention and accepted as sacred", the Red Cross was international. On the other hand, the Aid Societies, which were later to become the Red Cross Societies, had been conceived and created on the national plane only. They were independent of each other; no treaty stipulation united them in a legally constituted body. That did not come about until after the first World War. Nevertheless, the similarity of their aims and principles made them into a kind of family.

This relationship gave rise to exchanges, for which the Geneva Committee was the natural medium. As early as the first International Red Cross Conference, the Committee received
a mandate, which was to be several times renewed, to maintain and develop the relations between the National Societies; and to the Committee were entrusted commissions arising from common interests and tendencies: the recognition of the National Societies, the publication of an international bulletin, the preparation of conferences, plans for international conventions, and many others. This rôle, assigned from the beginning to the Geneva Committee, explains the title of "International Committee" which it was later to assume, although it remained, by its status and its composition, purely national, even local, for the first fifty years.

From 1866 onwards, successive wars gave several of the National Societies the opportunity to prove their usefulness. As for the International Committee which, at the time of the Prusso-Danish conflict of 1864, had already sent delegates to the belligerents, it repeated these missions, which were useful in gaining experience that would be of the greatest value for the improvement of the Conventions or the Red Cross Societies.

But the Committee did not stop at that. In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian war, it opened at Basle an "Information and Relief Agency for the Wounded and Sick". This Agency enlisted people of good will, organized them, and sent to the battlefield doctors, nurses, medical equipment and supplies. Its delegates visited the hospitals, issued relief and gave comfort and information.

The giving of information, the restoration of the link between the wounded soldier, lost in a field-hospital, and his family—that too was a task for the intermediary that the Committee wished to become. "Oh! sir, if you could write to my father, so that he could comfort my mother!", a dying soldier had said to Dunant. Dunant had written, and other helpers too; but for them, many families would never have known anything of the fate of their missing. The International Committee had remembered this.

Then a worker for the International Red Cross, Dr. Christ-Socin—a name to remember—had the idea of opening, alongside the Agency and in the same spirit, an information bureau for
prisoners of war. The Committee approved of this private venture and took it over, without, however, granting the use of the sign of the Red Cross, still reserved for the wounded and sick.

In 1877, during the Russo-Turkish conflict, the Committee founded the Trieste Agency, for the help of the wounded and sick only, and in 1912, at the time of the Balkan wars, the Belgrade Agency, for prisoners of war as well as for the wounded and sick.

But those were occasional activities. In the meantime the International Committee devoted itself to its permanent peace-time task, the carrying out of its mandates. The spread of the Red Cross idea, and the formation of National Societies throughout the world, increased its work as connecting link and international centre. The experience gained during wars gave it material for study. At the instance of the Red Cross, the "principle embodied in a Convention and accepted as sacred" was re-examined, improved, extended. First, at the Hague Conference of 1899, the principles of the 1864 Convention were adapted to naval warfare. Then, in 1906, the new Geneva Convention replaced that of 1864, now felt to be too brief. This time the basic idea of the Red Cross, outlined in the original text, was given full prominence, being clearly set forth in the first Article: "Officers and soldiers and other persons officially attached to the armed forces who are wounded and sick shall be respected and cared for, without distinction of nationality, by the belligerent in whose power they may be." The Convention further ordained measures to ensure this respect and care: it confirmed the protection due to medical staff and establishments and defined their status. It regulated the use of the protecting symbol. Finally, and this is to be noted, it put on the same footing as the protected medical staff, the staff of the voluntary aid societies, duly recognized and authorized by their Governments, that is to say, first and foremost, though they were not named, the National Red Cross Societies.

In its turn, this Convention was adapted, by the Hague Convention of 1907, to naval warfare. There followed the Hague Regulations of 1907 concerning the laws and customs of war on land. A whole section was devoted to prisoners of war.
This, in the development of the law of nations, was a step forward which freed prisoners of war from the arbitrary treatment to which they had hitherto been subjected. “Prisoners of War”, said Article 4, “are in the power of the hostile Government, but not of the individuals or corps who capture them. They must be humanely treated”. Disarmed, the prisoner of war was no longer at the mercy of his captor; he had a legal status. Although his condition as military captive restricted his liberty and gave him obligations towards the enemy, the latter also had obligations towards him.

Two provisions specially concerned the Red Cross, that contained in Article 14, instituting an official information bureau in each State, and that contained in Article 15, permitting societies for aid to prisoners of war to pursue their work of mercy—within the bounds set by military necessity.

* * *

Then a new chapter began in the history of the Red Cross. Actually no new element appeared, but there was a widening, a transference of the principle already accepted. For what is the principle of the Red Cross, if not this: a combatant who is sick or wounded, and therefore harmless, is no longer a soldier but only a human being. What matters now is not his nationality, but only his suffering. And what is a prisoner of war if not, in his way, a sick or wounded man? As soon as the measures are taken which make it impossible for him to do any harm, he is a man, and nothing more.

It will be understood why, after the declaration of war in 1914, the International Committee of the Red Cross devoted itself almost entirely to this new category of victims, the prisoners. Always anxious, in the event of conflict, to take part in relief work according to its position and its resources, what better could it do? For the wounded and sick, the National Societies, developed, organized, prepared for their tasks, were at their posts; but they were less in a position to help prisoners of war by serving as intermediary between them and the enemy country. The International Committee of the Red
Cross, although not perhaps the only body able to undertake such work, was the best prepared for it because of its former work at Basle and Trieste, which gave it experience and the trust of the belligerents. In any case it was the first to undertake it.

The attempt was an unprecedented success. Three months after the opening of the Geneva Agency, the twenty or so workers who had answered President Ador's appeal had become many hundreds. An entire museum building was needed to house them and their files. Moreover, they had to deal with a mail amounting to eighteen thousand items a day in all languages, and at the end of the war, they had made out and used seven million index-cards.

Nor was this all. The International Committee of the Red Cross remained involved until 1923 in various undertakings which might be called war activities: the repatriation of prisoners of war taken on the Eastern front, many scattered to the furthest corners of Siberia, and international relief work undertaken during the great famines and epidemics in Central and Eastern Europe.

After this, the International Committee of the Red Cross resumed its peace-time activities: the preparation of international conferences, legal and technical research, help in time of calamity, plans for the modification of the existing conventions or for new treaties in the light of the experience gained in the World War.

To a large extent this was preparation for war, which means that it was almost blasphemous at the time. Optimism was the order of the day. Had not the last War ended war? Would not the League of Nations and the great international bodies stifle at its birth anything which might cause a fresh conflagration? The Red Cross itself followed the general tendency: henceforward National Societies would be able to give their main energies to peaceful activities, such as the fight against illness and pain, the development of hygiene, the organization of help in case of natural disasters. Following the example of the nations, and with the purpose of practical cooperation in peace time, of mutual assistance and united activity, they formed.
themselves into an association, the "League of Red Cross Societies".

The League, the representative organ of the National Societies, was a permanent central body, for intercommunication, coordination and research. It aimed at promoting the formation and development of a National Red Cross Society in every country. Just as the International Committee co-operated with the National Societies with a view to perfecting the work done by the Red Cross for war victims, the League which, although it had independent legal status, was also their common instrument, cooperated with these Societies with a view to improving health, preventing illness and alleviating physical suffering.

* * *

Two events of capital importance mark the period between the wars, relating to the two aspects of the Red Cross: the international principle and the relief organization. The first was the adoption, in 1928, by the International Red Cross Conference meeting at The Hague, of the statutes of the International Red Cross. Until then, as has been seen, the organs of the Red Cross had legal status in the national field only. On the international plane, they were one body in actual fact, functioning through periodic conferences, or apparent in the mandates entrusted to the International Committee or to the League. The League, too, was an international organization, but it was a private association subject to national law, just as the Geneva Committee, international in name and work, was legally no more than a private association subject to Swiss law.

It was now a question of going further and giving to the union already achieved a statutory organization, of making it an entity in international law. The "International Red Cross", according to its statutes, comprises the National Societies, the International Committee and the League. Its highest legislative authority is the International Conference, composed of the delegates of these various bodies, and the delegates of the States party to the Geneva Conventions.

Thus, in law, the States, as such, became members of the
Red Cross and shared directly in its international life. While the statutory organization of the International Red Cross greatly strengthens the universality of the Red Cross movement, it in no way, lessens the autonomy of the Red Cross Societies in their national spheres. Neither can it modify the statutes of the Committee, nor those of the League.

The second event was the signing of the two Geneva Conventions of July 27, 1929, for the most part due to the preparatory work done by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The first, for the "Relief of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field", was a more complete and definite form of the 1906 Convention which it now replaced. The other was nothing less than what is called the "Prisoners of War Code".

The Prisoners of War Convention took up the section in the Hague Regulations of 1907 relating to prisoners of war, and expanded them into 97 articles. First it re-affirmed the principle:

"Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not of the individuals or formation who capture them.

"They shall at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity.

"Measures of reprisal against them are forbidden" ¹.

The principle was then completed:

"Prisoners of war are entitled to respect for their persons and honour. Women shall be treated with all consideration due to their sex.

"Prisoners retain their full civil capacity" ².

Further, the Prisoners Convention tries to fill up the gaps left in the text of 1907, seeking to define not so much the duties of prisoners of war as their rights and the obligations of the detaining Power with regard to them.

One part of the 1929 Convention directly concerns the Red Cross organizations and especially the International Committee.

¹) Art. 2
²) Art. 3
This is Part VI, entitled, "Bureaux of Relief and Information concerning Prisoners of War". Article 77 confirms the establishment of official Information Bureaux and describes in detail the way in which they should function. Article 78 repeats the authorization given to the recognized Relief Societies. Article 79, which was new, sanctions the earlier undertakings of the International Committee: the establishment of a Central Information Agency. This was the first time that a private institution had been mentioned by name in a humanitarian convention. The International Committee was mentioned twice more: in Article 87, which says that in the event of dispute between the belligerents regarding the application of the Convention, the Protecting Power may submit for the approval of the Powers in dispute the name of a person belonging to a neutral Power or a person "nominated by the International Red Cross Committee", who shall be invited to take part in the conference of the representatives of the belligerents in dispute; and in Article 88, belonging to the same section about the organization of control: "The foregoing provisions do not constitute any obstacle to the humanitarian work which the International Committee of the Red Cross may perform for the protection of prisoners of war with the consent of the belligerents concerned". The International Committee did not fail to make use of this.

* * *

The 1929 Convention was a victory for the Red Cross: the principle for which it stood was becoming ever more firmly established in the conscience of the nations. All its detailed regulations are but the repeated affirmation, in every part of the prisoner's life, of the principle that he is first of all a man, and that nothing, not even war, can deprive him of the things which are necessary for a man's material and spiritual life, and for his dignity.

But the Red Cross had further aims. Earlier wars really affected the armies alone; civilians were involved only indirectly. In the first World War civilians, even women and children,
were victims of bombardments by long-range guns and by planes; ships had been torpedoed; enemy aliens had been interned; hostages had been taken, and sometimes massacred. It was to be feared that increase of technical skill, not to mention of human wickedness, might make future wars more and more deadly for non-combatants.

The Red Cross did for these what it had done in 1863 for the wounded and sick, and later for prisoners. A plan for a Convention, drawn up chiefly by the International Committee, was carefully studied, set on foot and approved for submission to a diplomatic conference, by the International Red Cross Conference which met at Tokio in 1934. International diplomacy does not always move quickly, and when war broke out in 1939, the "Tokio Draft" was still no more than a draft.

Four more times, on the occasion of the wars of the Chaco, Abyssinia, Spain and China, the International Committee was called upon to play the part of intermediary for welfare purposes, by sending delegates, organizing relief work or a prisoners of war agency. The Spanish War especially, a civil war in which the Conventions did not automatically come into play, but in which the International Committee was nevertheless able to undertake and carry through large-scale relief schemes, had many lessons to teach. Before it was over the threat of a fresh world war was already looming up.

Once more, the International Committee had to make ready to play its specific part in the work of relieving the sufferings due to war.

* * *

Having come to the end of this historical sketch, we can briefly answer the question with which we began: "What is the International Committee of the Red Cross?" On the eve of the second World War, what was required of it?

In law, it was still only a private association. In actual fact it was a score of Swiss citizens, all of them giving their services, most of them occupying posts in business or the professions, assisted by a small permanent secretariat. The future belligerents required the Committee to perform a definite service,
by running the Prisoners of War Agency, and to do something not clearly defined: everything possible for the protection of prisoners of war, with the consent of the Powers concerned. What the Red Cross as a whole asked of it was to be a "neutral intermediary".

This was both much and little. Much, because no bounds were set to the nature of its interventions. Little, because nothing except the running of the Agency was definite, and especially because the texts we have been considering opened doors for the International Committee, but provided it with no means of action whatever. They conferred upon it neither legal authority nor material power. They put at its disposal neither sanctions to enforce respect for the Convention's regulations about the one activity it entrusted to the Committee, nor arms to compel acceptance of measures which the Convention recognized its right to take. And the Committee had no money.

Yet, although it could count only on the resources and the support that would willingly be given, it would have authority: the authority of the idea it served; it would have power: the power which made Dunant bend, through days and weeks, over the beds of the wounded; it would have energy: the hope which millions of human beings placed in it.

* * *

To make ready: that was Dunant's original idea, born of his sense of impotence; the idea behind the activities of the Aid Societies. It accounted for the whole history of the Red Cross, both for what it had achieved at the international Conferences and for what had been done in the national field. Never had it ceased studying ways of increasing its efficacy, following the progress of technical skill in order to profit by it, and anticipating needs in order to be prepared, when the moment came, to fulfil its duties as auxiliary to the Army Medical Service.

A National Society knows in advance, if not the extent, at least the nature of the work which will devolve upon it in the event of war. It is in its own country that it will have to
function. It is in contact with the army, and knows how many men, how many women and what kinds of equipment it must supply; it knows its resources. It is to a large extent able to organize and train its relief units according to a definite plan, so that they may identify themselves with the army, which knows beforehand that they will become its auxiliaries. For the International Committee of the Red Cross, the position is quite different. Except with regard to the Agency, no practical preparation can be made. This is not only because it has no financial resources, but because it does not know for what to prepare. Where will war break out? Between which States? In which fields will it be right and possible for the International Committee to intervene? The steps that it is permitted to take in the name of human charity will be determined by events, and even then it will still be necessary to obtain the consent of the belligerents. It is quite impossible to ask permission beforehand to take measures of which the nature, urgency and scope, and therefore of course, the ways and means, are all unknown. That is the difficulty of the International Committee of the Red Cross; what is required of it is improvisation—the very thing which the Red Cross originally set out to prevent! Even in the case of the Prisoners of War Agency, practical preparation can only be sketched out, for no-one knows even where the work is to be done; everything will depend on the centre of gravity of the war and on the possibility of communication. "A Central Agency of information regarding prisoners of war shall be established in a neutral country," says Article 79 of the 1929 Convention. "The International Committee of the Red Cross shall, if they consider it necessary, propose to the Powers concerned the organization of such an agency".

The International Committee "shall propose". All it can do, is not to delay matters by proposing and awaiting consent; as soon as war breaks out, it must establish the Agency. That is what it decided to do, and for that it prepared. Some of its members and staff had belonged to the 1914-1918 Agency. Their memories and experiences were useful. In May 1938, they set to work, devised a system, evolved a plan. They
decided on the form of the index-cards, and on the wording; they secured premises and assistants; they prepared beforehand the text of the notifications. In short, they constructed a "shadow" agency.

Then war broke out. On the first of September 1939, Poland was invaded. On the third of September, Great Britain and France went to war with Germany. That very day, four notifications left Geneva, informing the belligerents that the International Committee of the Red Cross was ensuring the establishment of the agency contemplated in Article 79 of the Prisoners of War Convention.

The Committee waited only to take possession of the premises put at its disposal by the Genevese authorities, to make the necessary arrangements there, to collect equipment and furniture, to call together and train the staff, and then, on September 14, the "Central Agency for Prisoners of War" was officially opened.
The Agency was a small workshop under the direction of members of the Committee and its secretariat—a handful of voluntary workers at their tables, card-indexes and filing-cabinets.

What was the work in hand? "This agency", says Article 79 of the Convention, "shall be charged with the duty of collecting all information regarding prisoners which they may be able to obtain through official or private channels, and the agency shall transmit the information as rapidly as possible to the prisoners' own country or the Power in whose service they have been".

Remarkable office work, and useful at that. But the Red Cross is not an office. It cannot content itself with waiting for information in order to file and transmit it to another office. For the Red Cross, a list of prisoners of war is not a document; it is a herd of human beings in a barbed-wire enclosure. A regimental number is not a piece of information, but a man, and a man in trouble. It stands, too, for a family in which something has snapped because the man has stopped writing home. Those who had worked with the 1914 Agency well knew that these families would not always have patience to wait until the military bureaux of their country had found them and put an end to their anxiety with the words "Killed in action" or
"Taken prisoner"; or else intensified it with the word "Missing". When they received one or other of these brief notices, they would ask a thousand questions. Killed! How did he die? Did he suffer? Where is he buried? A prisoner! Is he wounded? Is he ill? Is he not hungry or cold? Missing! Where is he? Heavens! Where is he?

In the confusion of war, with a hermetically sealed battle-front, to whom other than the Red Cross could they address these questions? So, either to the National Societies, who would send their letters on, or direct to Geneva, all these people would write, write; write...

They would have to be answered. Even if the card-index had nothing to say, those who asked must know that they were being attended to, and that everything humanly possible would be done to send them information. For this purpose, the Agency must keep track of all that happened, and not just vaguely, but with full particulars. Each man in whatever camp must have his "duplicate" at Geneva, where he could always be found and followed up. Moreover, when further information was required, the Agency would not be content to wait for it; it would go to seek it, if necessary. It would seek it through every possible medium, through the official bureaux or the National Red Cross of the opposite side; through the military authorities and the commandants of camps; through the Committee's delegates and even from other men in the same unit as the missing man.

That was the leading idea in the light of which the Agency organized itself and began to function, the principle which was to cause it to expand enormously and go beyond the sphere allotted to it by the Convention—the care of the prisoners of war alone—and extend its activity to civilians.

The history of the Agency cannot be written here; it would need a whole volume to itself. All we can do is to try to give a general idea of its work. Even this will only be intelligible if the reader makes a twofold effort. First, an effort of memory, to recall the main stages of the conflict; the going to war of nearly all the countries of the world, one after another, lightning
invasions, great battles and armistices which "created" prisoners of war in millions; the flight of refugees, deportations, mass transfers of populations, and then the final capitulations which left more millions of combatants in the power of their enemy, and of civilians seeking each other. Secondly, an effort of the imagination, to realize the effect of these events on the Agency's work. Then perhaps he will understand the meaning of these few figures: on September 1, 1939, the staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross consisted of 50 workers, at the end of April, 1945, of 3,921, of whom 2,585 were at the Agency alone; by the end of October, 1946, the Agency had made out and filed 39 million index-cards, forwarded 13 million letters and post-cards for prisoners of war, censored, transmitted—and often transcribed—24 million civilian messages.

Those are but a few figures.

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Straight away, in September 1939, four "national" departments were established, the German, British, French and Polish Departments, each attending to one of the four States and group of States at war. These national departments were the essential element of the Agency. It was they who kept the card-index, where was recorded and whence was subsequently sent out all information relating to individual men. There were also the general departments, technical for the most part, and the special departments set up according to the steps taken by the International Committee. All these together constituted the Central Agency, and at the beginning they occupied—and even then they shared it with other departments of the permanent Secretariat—one small part only of the immense building put at the Committee's disposal.

During the months of the "phoney war", the Agency had leisure to perfect its organization and its methods of work, to open up sections, to adapt itself to the volume of questions to be dealt with and to their fairly regular frequency. But in the spring of 1940, everything changed. From France alone,
seven hundred thousand letters arrived in a few weeks, as many as 60,000 in a single day. Fresh national sections had to be established, existing sections enlarged or split, new workers hastily recruited and trained, and the work divided. The “Palais électoral”, so recently much too large, was occupied to the last of its 50,592 square feet. Soon, indeed, it became too small for the Agency alone, which overflowed, while the Secretariat and the other sections which had shared the same building, themselves enlarged, split and transformed into departments of no mean size, occupied bank premises, hotels and flats. And so it was until the end of hostilities. The “workshop” of September 1939 had become a huge factory, with its benches, crowd of workers, machines—yes, its business machines. — and twenty-seven branches or secondary workshops scattered throughout Switzerland.

* * *

Let us try to see clearly how this factory was run. Its organization could never be permanently fixed, for circumstances compelled it to remain “in a state of perpetual flux”. Its first duty was to receive, note and forward information about prisoners of war. First of all, there were the official lists. These had to be copied. The manual transcription of 1914, which was slow and a source of mistakes, was replaced by the photostat, or, in the case of the lists on airgraphs sent from overseas by plane, by photographic enlargement. The copy was sent to the official bureau of the prisoners’ own country, the original went to the national section. There, each name in the list was transcribed, with all further particulars, on to a separate index-card. Then there was information about individual men. This went direct to the national sections concerned, where it was either copied on to the prisoners’ index-cards or filed with them. There were also notifications of death, letters written spontaneously or in answer to an enquiry, statements from fellow-soldiers and, in particular, “capture cards”.

According to the 1929 Convention, every prisoner of war must be enabled, not later than one week after his arrival in camp, or
in case of sickness, to send his next of kin a card informing them of his capture and the state of his health. This was the "capture card". In addition, prisoners of war were permitted to send letters or postcards according to the number fixed by the detaining Power. These were sent through the post. But in a war like the last, there were many obstacles in the way of mail intended for the opposite side: the censor, administrative delays, or military necessity interrupted communications. How many delays when the country to which the mail was going was invaded, disorganized, cut in two!

It was with this in mind that the International Committee of the Red Cross decided to introduce another "capture card", which gradually came into general use. It was a duplicate, more or less, of the card intended for the family, and was addressed to the Central Agency, where it was filed with the sender's index-card. Thus, wherever they had fled, the family which the prisoner's mail could not reach could apply to Geneva, and there was the card, a sign of life given by the prisoner himself. Another great advantage was that, having been filled in by the man himself, the card made it possible to complete, correct or bring up to date information previously received.

From the next-of-kin, enquiries came pouring in at the rate of several thousands a day. They were scrutinised, sorted and sent to the national sections, where they were collated with the card-index. When an enquiry tallied with an index-card bearing the same name—this was called "a tally"—the Agency sent the information asked for. If, on the other hand, the card-index had nothing to say, the enquiry was filed to await a tally. Simply to wait? Yes, if it seemed likely that the same name might appear in lists now being examined or soon to arrive. Otherwise the International Committee made the investigations mentioned above. It also made enquiries if the information in the card-index was obsolete or incomplete, or when a man was missing, or a prisoner of war had stopped writing home, or again when it sought information for a prisoner who had no news of his family.

We must bear in mind the conscientiousness, the attention to detail, the intelligence, and the tact, too, that were needed for
this work of checking, filing and investigation, among those millions of index-cards bearing names in all languages, often wrongly spelt, sometimes identical. All the particulars, first names, date of birth, regimental number, details of enlistment, must be collated to avoid all mistakes, or, on the other hand, to find the man whose card was wrongly filed because his name was wrongly spelt. Here in a French village was a woman who had no news of her son. Martin was his name—Jean Martin. Why did the Red Cross, instead of answering her question, ask her for so many details? For her there was only one Jean Martin, hers, and the whole village knew him well. Could that mother know that in the Agency’s files, that is to say in the camps of Germany, there were fifteen thousand men of the name of Martin, and that it was among fourteen hundred Jean Martins that hers must be sought, and that the Agency wanted to find him for her? A mistake in date or number, and the information would be false: a mistake in filing, and perhaps a man would be lost. And as many as 45,000 index-cards a day were sorted, checked and filed.

In the summer of 1940 it was noted that 40,000 enquiries for Frenchmen alone remained without “tallies”. Forty thousand men were missing. No doubt they had been killed in battle and hastily buried in the midst of retreat. A fresh scheme was tried. The names of prisoners of war belonging to the same unit as the missing man were sought out among the files. Circular letters were sent to these men in the camps, to ask where and in what circumstances they had last seen their comrade. This work was done forty thousand times. Thirty thousand cases were cleared up.

This gigantic task of information was the fundamental activity of the Agency. But there were other tasks too, and these demanded either a great deal of extra work on the part of the national sections, or the organization of other sections where similar care would be necessary.

There was the prisoners’ ordinary correspondence. This was authorized by the Convention and taken over by the postal services. But it was slow and sometimes interrupted by events.
To be on the safe side, prisoners or next of kin would send it via the Agency. Or the Swiss postal authorities, through whose hands it was passing, would themselves send it to the Agency, which was momentarily able to despatch it more rapidly. Thus it came about that 13,000,000 letters and postcards had to be forwarded for prisoners of war. Thirteen million is a considerable number. It would have been simpler perhaps if the forwarding had been all, but there was more to do. Many of these messages were a source of information which might make it possible to complete or correct the particulars in the card-index. And then, in case they failed to reach their destination, some record at least must be kept of them in Geneva. So, several more million times, the national sections checked, noted and filed.

Further, we have the "telegraphic messages" and the "express messages". The first of these, although provided for in the Convention, were not often permitted by the belligerents. They were chiefly used from 1945 onwards for Japan, owing to the absence of postal communications, and after encountering great technical difficulties. The second, reserved for prisoners and next of kin without news for more than three months, and sent by air, were chiefly used for communicating with countries overseas. There were 700,000 of these, and they were all checked and examined before despatch.

Lastly, there was the transmission of official and private documents—papers relating to contracts, powers of attorney and assignment of pay, or important private business papers—and of photographs of soldiers' graves or the funerals of prisoners of war; and there was the Effects Department, which had the duty of preserving, and as soon as possible forwarding to next-of-kin, articles found on the battle-field or left by prisoners who had died. Less spectacular perhaps than other work, these activities nevertheless rendered invaluable service by helping to ease the pain of separation.

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All this work, to which thousands of people, many of them voluntary workers, devoted themselves ceaselessly day after day, concerned only prisoners of war and the "civilian internees" who ranked with them.

What about civilians? Was there not a war for them too? War, yes, but Conventions, no. None of the families who, among other disasters brought by the war, were severed, had means of contact. It was impossible to write to the relative who had stayed on the other side of the front, and impossible to hear from him. Nothing crossed the battle-line except the prisoners of war mail—the only mail provided for by treaty. Would this terrible anxiety, these senseless questionings, have to continue till the end of the war? If only they had, in a neutral country, a relative or a friend to whom they could write, trying to make him understand by covert hints—because of the censor—that if he would be so kind as to send news to the son or the father who was on the other side, and try to find out what has become of him, they would be so grateful. But very few had a relative or a friend in a neutral country. Well then, there was the Red Cross at Geneva, which looked after the prisoners; would that perhaps act as a kind friend? And send a short letter, just one? Or at least convey the main points? That would not be a lot of work, would it?

Yes, the Red Cross would be the friend required. Renewing the work done during the Spanish War, which enabled thousands of families to keep contact across the front, the International Committee of the Red Cross negotiated with the belligerents, and won. With restrictions of course: there were to be twenty-five words conveying a message concerning the family only, on a standard form. That meant that from each letter which reached the Agency, the essential part must be extracted and transcribed—often translated too—on to a special form.

A thousand transcriptions a day—that was the number in September 1939. If the war should spread, it would be impossible to keep up to date. Transcription must be simplified and reduced to a minimum. The National Societies, warned of this, realized the magnitude of the problem and fell in with the solution: a model form—Form 61—which was to be adopted successively
by one hundred and eight Red Cross or other societies, was
drawn up and issued in each country. Henceforth the sender
would himself write his twenty-five words on the form, which
would also be used for the reply. Moreover, National Societies
would collect these messages, and themselves despatch them
to Geneva, in sacks accompanied by a consignment note. It
will be seen that this simplification was wise, if one considers
that from the spring of 1940 onwards the messages reached
Geneva in ever bigger avalanches; that while transcription
was gradually reduced—although 400,000 messages, not
counting 130,000 telegraphic messages were nevertheless
transcribed—this did not put an end to sorting according to
language nor to checking with the card-index; that it was
often necessary to make out fresh cards; that the messages had
to be sorted according to country, stamped and despatched;
and, lastly, that each message had to be carefully scrutinised
since a few abuses would perhaps suffice to bring about the
collapse of the whole system.

Similar work had to be done when the answer arrived. If
there was no answer, the National Red Cross of the country to
which the message was sent was invited to state the cause, if
necessary to make an enquiry, so that the sender might be
informed.

This work of transmitting civilian messages sometimes set the
International Committee of the Red Cross problems which
appeared insoluble. There was the ever renewed obligation
to find ways of communication in a world determined to destroy
them. Then the workers had to adapt themselves to constant
irregularity in the arrival of messages, to the rush of work when
as many as 80,000 came in a single day. And there was the
problem of finding enough persons capable of examining and
transcribing messages written in nearly all the languages of the
world. No doubt many messages only arrived after considerable
delays, sometimes even after the person for whom they were
intended had already received news through other channels.
But was it the fault of the Red Cross if the lines by which the
messages were to travel were destroyed, or if ships did not sail,
or if, somewhere in a belligerent country, sacks piled up in an office or a station?

One has only to note the increase in the number of messages passing through the Agency to measure the need which the Red Cross was meeting. In the autumn of 1939, there were a thousand a day. At the end of 1940, the total was nearly a million; two years later it was more than six million; after another three years, at the end of 1945, it was twenty-three and a half million. The fluctuations in this work of the Agency follow the great events of the war: in 1940, the exodus in France; in the spring of 1941, the invasion of the Balkans; in December, the entry into the war of the United States. Each event was accompanied by a great flood of messages from a fresh source. In the spring of 1942, it was South America, and the following year, Japan. When the Allies landed in Morocco and Algeria, cutting off communications with the home country, 1,500,000 family messages passed between North Africa and France alone. As many passed between Southern Italy and Northern Italy after the armistice of 1943.

"A short letter, just one, please!"

"Yes, my friend. Twenty-three million five hundred thousand times, ten thousand times a day for six years”.

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The Civilian Message Section, a venture of the International Committee of the Red Cross, having no legal basis but carried through successfully thanks to constant collaboration with the National Societies, gave birth to another scheme, the Dispersed Families Section. The size to which the Message Section had grown was an indication of the displacements caused by invasions, the flight of refugees and the bombing of cities. If to these were added the deportations of many persons who were as though withdrawn from the world, beyond the reach of family messages, one trembled to think of the millions of people, who, when hostilities were over, would try to find one another, but would not know where to find one another; and of the thousands
of children who would be lost. Therefore, in agreement with the National Societies, the Committee devised a system of special cards which were put at the disposal of displaced persons in each country, filled in by the people concerned and sent to the Agency for filing. This scheme was begun in 1943, and the new card-index performed many services. Yet the great task to which the department has set its hand was far from being accomplished. In the country where there was the greatest need for this scheme, the only country in which displaced persons, evacuees, foreign workers, and people in concentration camps were to be counted by millions, the International Committee could not get the cards distributed. But, when, after the war, UNRRA set up special departments in Germany for the help of displaced persons, the International Committee was able to hand over its 250,000 index-cards.

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The amount of work done by all these national and special sections did not represent their own activity alone. It also included that of the following general or secondary sections which were at their disposal.

The Lists Section and The Photostat Section which has been mentioned, and which was to produce three million prints.

The Typing Section which itself, before the work was passed on to the national sections, made out five million index-cards, and which was in charge of correspondence and duplicating.

The Preliminary Filing Section, which had arduous work to do because it was always encountering difficulties of language, of phonetics, or mistakes in transcription.

The Broadcasting Section which was long in preparation but, for lack of the necessary consent, unable to function until May 1945, after which it transmitted lists comprising 300,000 names.

The Watson Section, so-called from the wonderful machines kindly lent to the International Committee of the Red Cross by Mr. Watson\(^1\) himself, which was to turn out 8,600,000

\(^1\) Chairman of the International Business Machines Co., New York.
perforated index-cards, sort 66 1/2 million and make out lists of more than 24 million. Other departments than the Agency, notably the Relief Division, made great use of it. If it is remembered that the total number of cards which passed through these machines was 240,000,000, it will be understood that without them much sorting, filing and statistical work, and the periodic checking of stocks and the shipment of relief parcels, could never have been done.

Last, but not least, the Evening Section, in which all the people anxious to lend their aid to the Red Cross, but free in the evening only, performed various urgent tasks for one department or another. These admirable and unassuming helpers alone made out 250,000 index-cards, filed five million, transcribed or examined 200,000 messages.

What of the Auxiliary Sections, opened in the summer of 1940, when letters were arriving at the rate of 60,000 a day? They were the branches, the secondary workshops of the Agency, set up in twenty-seven towns in Switzerland, where crowds of other voluntary workers wanted to do something for the victims of the war, some every day, some in the evening after their work or for a few hours a week. Thanks to them, the work could be divided. Index-cards to make out, messages to transcribe, translations, were sent to them in bundles. With their help the Agency was able to cope with its mountains of letters, each of which had a moving story to tell.

* * *

Article 79 of the 1929 Geneva Convention reads:

"A Central Agency of information regarding prisoners of war shall be established in a neutral country. The International Committee of the Red Cross shall, if they consider it necessary, propose to the Powers concerned the organization of such an agency."

This mandate has been carried out.
The organization of a Central Information Agency was the only definite task which the Conventions expressly entrusted to the International Committee. They supplied, however, welcome opportunities for other humanitarian work.

The first was Article 15 of the 1907 Hague Regulations, which was repeated almost word for word in Article 78 of the Prisoners of War Convention, stipulating that societies for the relief of prisoners of war should be permitted, within certain limits, to distribute relief in the camps. There was nothing to prevent the International Committee from being one of these relief societies, as will seen later.

The second was Article 79 of the Prisoners of War Convention, which, after providing for the organization of the Central Agency, added: "These provisions shall not be interpreted as restricting the humanitarian work of the International Red Cross Committee".

How can the International Committee extend its work beyond the Agency proper? This can not be known beforehand; circumstances must decide. The nature of the schemes initiated by the International Committee are determined by the need that may arise; their proportions by the means put at its disposal. The carrying-out of the schemes depends on the
permission and the practical facilities granted by the Powers concerned, and further on the obstacles created by hostilities.

There is, however, one piece of work which the International Committee can undertake at once, and which enables it to judge of the necessity for any other particular measure. It can visit the camps and see how the prisoners of war are treated there. For this purpose it invokes tradition and resorts to the third opportunity: Article 88 of the Prisoners of War Convention.

It has often been stated verbally and in writing that the International Committee of the Red Cross is the guardian of the Geneva Conventions. This is incorrect. Diplomatic treaties are the concern of Governments, so-called "Red Cross" Conventions like the rest. The International Committee is the guardian of the principles of the Red Cross, which is not the same thing.

Of the two Conventions of 1929, the first, concerning the wounded and sick, provided for neither inspection nor sanctions. The High Contracting Parties pledged themselves to respect the provisions of the Convention in all circumstances, and to put matters right if they had violated them in any way—and that was all: it was a question of honour. The Prisoners of War Code, on the other hand, instituted inspection—in very diplomatic terms: "The High Contracting Parties", says Article 86, "recognize that a guarantee of the regular application of the present Convention will be found in the possibility of collaboration between the protecting Powers charged with the protection of the interests of the belligerents." Collaboration will take this form: "The representatives of the protecting Power or their recognized delegates shall be authorized to proceed to any place, without exception, where prisoners of war are interned. They shall have access to all premises occupied by prisoners and may hold conversation with prisoners, as a general rule without witnesses, either personally or through the intermediary of interpreters." Article 87 goes on in terms no less carefully chosen: "In the event of dispute between the belligerents regarding the application of the provisions of the present Convention, the protecting Powers shall, as far as possible, lend their good offices with the object of settling the dispute."
Inspection, then, was provided for; but there were still no sanctions. What sanctions could there be? It is a question not of a trade agreement, but of a humanitarian Convention. Therefore, violation by one of the parties does not give the other party grounds for denouncing the Convention. Reprisals? Article 2, already quoted, rightly forbids them. The State which had recourse to them would only make itself guilty of the violation of which it accuses its opponent; it would only add to innocent victims, more innocent victims. Lastly, the supreme sanction which a State can impose upon the contracting partner who violates his promises, namely war, is already in operation.

In these circumstances inspection may seem to be of no avail. Yet the facts make it possible to affirm its effectiveness, for, in the absence of legal sanctions, there are moral sanctions. There is the fear of letting a neutral Power witness too flagrant breaches of provisions universally considered sacred, and to respect which is the mark of a civilized nation.

The 1914-18 War showed that inspection was necessary. The Hague Regulations, which were very brief, turned out in practice to be insufficient, and the belligerents had to fill in the gaps by temporary agreements, to which the International Committee of the Red Cross was no stranger. Its delegates, when distributing relief or making enquiries for the Agency, entered into the camps. They could observe things for themselves or record the complaints of prisoners. Thus, on the strength of their reports, and taking its stand less on the texts of Conventions than on principles, the Committee was able to suggest improvements, and to have deficiencies supplied and abuses corrected. This actually was inspection, and gradually became accepted as such. So great was its usefulness that when, on the basis of the work done by the International Committee, the Prisoners of War Convention was worked out, inspection was organized. It was difficult, obviously, to ask a private society to supervise the application of a diplomatic treaty. Moreover, the International Committee might cease to exist, or might not always be in a position to perform this task. Therefore, inspection was entrusted to the Protecting Power. In
order, however, to make possible the continuance of what was already a tradition much appreciated by prisoners, Article 88, which we have already quoted, was added: "The foregoing provisions do not constitute any obstacle to the humanitarian work which the International Red Cross Committee may perform for the protection of prisoners of war with the consent of the belligerents concerned."

In the very first days of the war, while it was organizing the Central Agency, the International Committee offered the belligerents its services as a neutral intermediary and sent them delegates. The latter's instructions were that, by holding themselves at the disposal of the Governments and the National Red Cross Societies in all matters pertaining to the work of the International Committee, they should form a link with the Committee, and, should it intervene, help it to do so more easily and swiftly. They also had a definite mission, which was to visit the camps and see whether the treatment granted to the inmates was in harmony with the principles of the Convention.

It may be thought that this activity of the International Committee duplicated that of the Protecting Power. On the contrary, the two are complementary.

This is true first of all in the quantitative sense. When prisoners of war are counted by hundreds of thousands, even by millions, it is physically impossible to conduct continuous detailed inspection. Both the Protecting Power and the International Committee of the Red Cross may plan to carry out their duties with the utmost care, but they have at their disposal only a limited number of delegates, and these can only visit the camps at intervals. Then again, the condition of the prisoners of war may change quickly. Therefore two visits are better than one; two reports, if they are in agreement, carry more weight than a single one.

It is true in the qualitative sense also. Although parallel, and leading to the same kind of visits, the same kind of conversations with the prisoners and their guards, the two activities take place on different planes. The Protecting Power, as is well
known, is a neutral State to which a belligerent Power entrusts its interests in the enemy's territory, pending the restoration of direct diplomatic relations. It is a special mandatory. The International Committee, on the other hand, is nobody's mandatory; it is a neutral intermediary equally at the disposal of all. Whereas the one acts at the request of a particular State and on its behalf, and takes as its standard the text of the contract—the 1929 Convention—made between its principal and the enemy, the other intervenes in the name of humanity and takes as its criterium the high principles of which the Convention is only one form of expression. The first attends only to certain prisoners of war, by reason of their nationality which makes them, so as to say, its citizens by proxy, the other is equally interested in all, simply because they are prisoners, that is to say, war victims. Again, since it acts simultaneously in both camps, which is not necessarily true of the Protecting Power, the International Committee has means of comparison of which it can make use in its negotiations.

Although this part of the activity of the International Committee of the Red Cross was less spectacular than, say, the Agency, or the relief work, of which we shall hear more later, it was nevertheless one of its most important and delicate tasks. For it is necessary to state that the essential provisions of the Prisoners of War Convention were too often inadequately respected, even ignored and violated.

This complete or partial failure to apply the Convention was due to many causes, each of which gave rise to action on the part of the Committee, to long and usually very difficult negotiations, or to steps involving considerable labour.

The first cause was the absence, real or alleged, of any treaty obligation.

Sometimes this obligation was really lacking: some States who were to take part in the World War, such as Russia, Japan, Finland and several South American countries, had not ratified the 1929 Convention. The International Committee proposed that they should nevertheless implement its provisions *de facto*. 
This suggestion was adopted, at least partially, by most of the States; not by all—that is why the Soviet prisoners of war in Germany and the German prisoners of war in the U.S.S.R. remained outside the Convention and could never be visited by representatives of the International Committee.

Sometimes States chose to assert that they were bound by no treaty obligation. This involves the whole question of "partisans". The vicissitudes of the war produced, in legal relations between States, such an upheaval as had never been known before in history. States were annexed and simply struck off by the invader from the list of sovereign Powers. Other States appeared which had no existence before. While some Governments took refuge, or were formed abroad, their legal existence denied by the invader of their country, other Governments were constituted which only the invader of their territory considered legitimate. Either side refused to acknowledge the other as a legal belligerent.

As long as resistance remained underground, and expressed itself only by isolated acts, the consequences of which were impossible to investigate, there was practically no problem of the kind we are considering. But as soon as the activities of the partisans came into the open and gave rise to real operations of war, the matter assumed a very serious aspect. There were indeed good reasons for fearing for the life of the partisans who had fallen into the enemy's hands. Was the 1929 Convention applicable to them? The captor always claimed that it was not. Legally, it was usually an open question. According to its first Article, the Prisoners of War Convention is applicable to all the persons referred to in the first three Articles of the Hague Regulations, which affirm: "The laws, rights and duties of war apply not only to the army but also to militia and volunteer corps fulfilling the following conditions:

1. They must be commanded by a person responsible for his subordinates;

2. They must have a fixed distinctive sign recognizable at a distance;
3. They must carry arms openly; and
4. They must conduct their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war.

It is certain that, in the early days especially, partisans rarely fulfilled the four conditions set forth by the Regulations. The second, in particular, was frequently disregarded. Therefore, by keeping to the letter of the law, it was possible to deny them the status of belligerents and the benefit of the 1929 Convention. Even had they met all legal requirements, the captor State could always claim that Regulations and Convention did not bind it as regards combatants belonging to a Government which it did not recognize, and which therefore was not a party to these treaties. This was the plea put forward for denying to captured partisans the treatment due to prisoners of war, and the right to any kind of inspection.

Any steps in their behalf must therefore not be based on legal stipulations, but on principles. The question remained open whether their organization was, or was not in conformity with treaty provisions; whether the Government they were serving was, or was not legitimate in the eyes of the enemy; these partisans were de facto combatants, just as much as parachutists dropped behind the enemy lines; they acted for, and by order of authorities exercising de facto sovereign rights.

The International Committee of the Red Cross considered, therefore, that, as far as it was concerned, the situation of these men was independent of the legal appreciation of belligerents concerning the nature of the struggle. In every case, it tried to intervene between the parties to obtain, if not recognition of a legal obligation to observe the Conventions, at least respect for the principles which they embodied. And when, after the landing in France, partisan activity increased, the Committee appealed to all the European belligerents collectively, asking them that in the fight between partisans and regular armies, both sides should consider themselves bound by the Conventions.

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1 Art. 1.
The replies varied; some were favourable and definite, others verbal only, or evasive, or containing reservations. Equally varied were the results obtained, after endless negotiations, effort and appeals. The war was then at its highest pitch of violence. Both sides were trying to destroy their enemies by every means in their power, behind the lines as well as at the front, to strike them at the heart, to crush their morale as well as their armaments. The refusal to consider partisans as belligerents, with the implicit threat for those who might be unlucky enough to be taken prisoner, and for their families, was a weapon not willingly relinquished, if it seemed likely to be useful in quelling insurrection.

Thus it happened that the International Committee intervened on behalf of the “Free French Forces”, organized outside France by General de Gaulle, and later, on behalf of the “French Forces of the Interior”. Although the former came into the war in units bearing all the characteristics of a regular army, and the enemy was notified that the latter were part of the army, the German High Command, taking its stand on the terms of the 1940 Armistice and alleging that neither the London Committee nor its successor, the Provisional Government of Algiers, had any legal existence, declared on both occasions that combatants in these forces would be considered to be francs-tireurs. What that implies is well-known. Algiers then reserved the right, if it did not obtain satisfaction, to take, with regard to German prisoners, all steps that should be “opportune”.

Difficult and delicate, at times dramatic negotiations were accompanied by the fear that some double execution of prisoners, such as did once occur, might unloose a chain of reprisals. Finally the Committee obtained the assurance that the members of the Free French Forces, and later those of the F.F.I., who had fallen into enemy hands, should be treated as prisoners of war.

In the same way the Committee had to intervene, from 1943 onwards, with regard to the Jugoslav partisans. The attitude of the German authorities was sometimes favourable, sometimes not, and the International Committee was never able to verify
regularly the treatment of these prisoners. It obtained, however, a few meagre results; its delegates could visit and send relief to certain camps.

Similar efforts were made in behalf of Slovak partisans, with partial results painfully achieved; in behalf of the insurgents of Warsaw, for whom the Committee obtained a few assurances and finally the promise of their admission to a neutral country, although this was made impossible by the course of military operations; in behalf of the Greek partisans, some of whom were considered prisoners of war and could be visited; and in behalf of Italian partisans and members of the Italian Army after 1943. For the Germans, affecting not to know that the Italian Army legally existed, considered the regular soldiers of Badoglio’s army to be francs-tireurs. There again, the International Committee obtained the application of the Convention. More details about all that will be found in a paper issued in 1946. It will suffice to recall the circumstances of the time to visualize what efforts were required in Geneva to secure a hearing, mid the din of increasingly total warfare, and despite all legal quibbling, for the old-fashioned plea of human charity.

All these cases concern prisoners whose status as belligerents and, consequently, whose right to the benefits of the Conventions could up to a certain point be questioned, if the texts were interpreted literally.

In this category of cases of failure to apply the Conventions on account of the alleged absence of treaty obligations there were others, perhaps more serious because of the consequences they may have in the future. Such were the cases in which the detaining Power deprived prisoners of war of the benefits of the 1929 Convention, or denied them to members of a regular army whose fulfilment of all the conditions required by the Hague Statute it did not even question. Thus, after the annexation of Poland, Germany said that there was no longer any Polish State, and made that a pretext for converting the

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Polish prisoners of war, except the officers, into civilian workers; in this way, although no peace treaty had regulated the political situation, they arbitrarily put the prisoners beyond the reach of the guarantees of international law and the inspection provided for by the Conventions, in order to subject them to internal law only, that is to say to the discretion of the detaining Power. In the same manner hundreds of thousands of French prisoners of war were converted into workers on the basis of agreements concluded with the Vichy Government.

Here is another example. It will be remembered that, at the time of the Italian Armistice of 1943, the German forces disarmed a great part of the Italian forces, their recent allies. Giving as their reason the circumstances in which these soldiers had been captured, the Germans considered them to be "military internees", to whom the Conventions did not apply.

Finally, in their turn, the Allies created for enemy combatants who had fallen into their hands after the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan, and on the grounds of this surrender, fresh categories not provided for in any treaty: "Disarmed Military Personnel", or "Surrendered Enemy Personnel". Although it did not succeed in having these men placed under the legal protection of the Conventions, the International Committee was permitted to visit their camps, and to perform in their behalf, partly at least, its customary services.

* * *

Besides cases of total failure to implement the Prisoners of War Convention, which involved the Committee in what were practically diplomatic negotiations, the entire course of the War was marked by countless lapses, by partial violations of some particular stipulation of the said Convention. They cannot be enumerated here, but we may say that the delegates' reports on many occasions witnessed to the satisfactory implementing of the Convention, but had too often unfortunately occasion to call attention to more or less serious infringements.
Indispensable improvements could often be secured on the spot through representations to the camp commandant or the superior authority. In many cases, however, the Committee itself had to take action, return time and again to the subject, and enter into endless discussion and negotiation.

While it is impossible to enumerate all the occasions on which the provisions contained in the Conventions were violated—for that it would be necessary to examine thousands of reports—at least we can indicate the main causes of violation. This will at the same time give the reader an idea of the nature of the International Committee's interventions and of the difficulties of every kind which it encountered.

There were unintentional violations due to the circumstances of warfare. The best-intentioned belligerent cannot, when prisoners of war are falling into his hands in hundreds of thousands, in territory where everything has been thrown into confusion by fighting, provide them at a moment's notice with food, lodging, and treatment as stipulated in the Conventions. It takes weeks to fit up camps and organize provisioning. If a Power is grappling with the most serious economic difficulties, if the destruction and disorganisation due to the war paralyze the feeding of its own population, then prisoners of war suffer from the effects. And when every part of the territory can be reached by air, when everything becomes a target for bombers, prisoners may be exposed to danger through no fault of the detaining Power. As a matter of fact, many prisoners of war were killed, either in camp or in convoys in the interior of the country, by bombs dropped by their own air force.

On some occasions too, regulations were deliberately disregarded (penalties, prohibited employment, reprisals), or misinterpreted (insufficient food, defective hygiene), perhaps with the idea of securing better discipline, or from other motives.

But there is no doubt that the most frequent cause of violation was carelessness, due to ignorance of the provisions of the Convention among subaltern ranks who were entrusted with the administration and guarding of camps, and also due to the incompetence, inefficiency and lack of authority of too many
responsible commandants. Too often the texts of the Convention were buried in a welter of service regulations which the men available had neither the time to study properly, nor the capacity to fathom. The best of the army was diverted, by the necessities of war, into other services than the guarding of camps.

All these causes of violation, whether intentional or not, derived from another: when it was not ill-will, it was lack of interest in the enemy prisoner. When the wills of all are concentrated on a single purpose, the winning of the war, when each citizen is suffering personally from the effects of war, from starvation and destruction, there is little interest in the degree of comfort enjoyed by enemy prisoners. It is natural that in countries tortured for years, even the least vindictive people end by considering each man personally guilty of the crimes committed. Whatever he suffered in captivity was still too lenient a punishment.

The Red Cross has neither to condemn nor to excuse. The Red Cross must understand—that too is a form of charity—and persevere.

It must persevere, no matter why the principles for which it stands are violated, and no matter how doubtful its activities may sometimes appear. In this field, the Committee's task is often misunderstood, and always a thankless one. It may display interest in all prisoners of war without distinction; it may disregard their nationality and look upon them simply as men in distress; the fact remains that in all countries the beneficiaries of its relief are national enemies.

It must persevere, so that temporary deficiencies shall not be prolonged; so that mistakes, whether intentional or not, shall be put right; so that what is satisfactory shall remain so.

It must persevere in order to safeguard all principles that can be safeguarded in a war in which ideas suffer as much destruction as men and things. In this matter principles are a source of life. In endeavouring to win respect for them, the International Committee or its delegates exert influence not only on the
immediate fate of the men with whom they are concerned at the moment, but also on the health and lives of those in behalf of whom they will have to act on the morrow, or later, or—who knows?—in some future war.

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One might perhaps be tempted to conclude from what has just been said that the Conventions and the control they allowed were a failure. That would be a great mistake. It is true that we have only spoken of violations; they must be discussed, for self-deception is foolish. People and things must be seen as they are, if what is perfectible is to be perfected.

It is said that fortunate countries have no history; likewise, honest dealing and the keeping of promises yield no theme for dissertation. Such virtues do exist. Doubtless, there are but few prisoners of war who will say they were happy in camp. Neither Conventions, nor Red Cross can prevent captivity from being an ordeal. However well treated, a prisoner of war is always a prisoner, therefore unhappy. The sole object of the Conventions and consequent supervision is that in his distress he shall be treated as a man, and not like a wild animal, and that no barbed-wire shall be too dense and no fence too high to prevent a little kindness from reaching him.

That is quite difficult enough.

It may be said that, on the whole, it was in the countries which were farthest from the theatre of war and material and moral damage, that is to say where the ground was less favourable to the growth of the causes of violation set forth above, that the Conventions were best observed. Yet even in the most sorely tried countries, there were camps where the principles of Geneva were respected as much as circumstances allowed. The camp commandants and guards who carried out their task with humanity and understanding, although not always sufficiently influential, were not so rare as might be
supposed, from the subaltern who more or less secretly helped on the relief work of the Red Cross, to the General who applied the Convention to the point of paradox. His attention was drawn to the resentment felt by the population of the friendly country where he was stationed, and which was suffering gravely from underfeeding, at the sight of enemy prisoners of war, recently their cruel masters, being fed as abundantly as his own forces. He merely replied: "My country has put its name to a treaty. As long as that treaty remains in force, I shall honour its signature".

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How is the activity of the International Committee of the Red Cross in this sphere to be appraised? It is scarcely possible, as in the case of the Agency and the relief work, to quote figures which the imagination may translate at leisure into work or results. If we were to calculate in tons of paper the reports and notes made hitherto by the Department for Prisoners, Internees and Civilians, or in millions of words the applications made to camp commandants or military authorities, or in trips round the world the journeys made by the delegates in the course of their eight thousand visits to camps, the reader would perhaps gain an idea of the total amount of work done, but the results of this work remain unexpressed.

We have the psychological result, the effect produced in the camps by the mere arrival of this civilian, this friend, the Committee's delegate. The Red Cross has come to the camp: so we are not quite forgotten!

And there are the practical results: almost complete observance of the Convention, due to the mere fact that the camps were visited or, on the other hand, improvements and reforms laboriously secured, one by one.

And yet, this work can be measured without many statistics. A single comparison is enough. One only has to remember the fate in certain countries of military or civilian prisoners,
who were protected by no Convention, or to whom neither Protecting Power nor Red Cross could gain access. There were in the same country, for example, American prisoners of war, with a five per thousand, that is a normal death-rate, and Soviet prisoners, deprived of the protection of the 1929 Convention, or civilian deportees in the concentration camps...

What need to say more?
"The food ration of prisoners of war shall be equivalent in quantity and quality to that of the depot (army base) troops. Clothing, underwear and footwear shall be supplied to prisoners of war by the Detaining Power. The regular replacement and repair of such articles shall be ensured".

These two provisions, quoted from Articles 11 and 12 of the Convention, are in themselves sufficient to cover the material needs of the prisoners. Nothing more could be expected, in the treatment of enemies, than to place them on the same footing as the forces of the Detaining Power itself.

Yet the Convention goes further. It foresees two ways in which the prisoners may receive extra supplies, individually or collectively. Article 37 allows prisoners of war "to receive individually postal parcels containing foodstuffs and other articles intended for consumption, or clothing". Article 78, already quoted, authorizes prisoners' aid societies "having as their object to serve as intermediaries for charitable purposes", to have relief supplies distributed in the camps. Combined with so many other regulations about accommodation, sports and games, and the spiritual and intellectual needs of the men,

1 This Article is almost the word for word repetition of Article 15 of the Hague Regulations of 1907.
these provisions clearly show the desire of the legislators of 1907 and 1929 always to place the human being before the prisoner. Not only is his maintenance ensured, but he may receive, even in captivity, such aids to morale as are afforded by parcels from home and occasional gifts from welfare societies.

All this would be excellent, if total war did not often deprive Detaining Powers of the means, sometimes even of the desire, strictly to carry out its treaty obligations. As a matter of fact, it was noted that in certain countries regulations about food were never exactly observed, for one reason or another. The deficiency had to be made up by relief supplies. What should be merely welcome extras or temporary supplements soon became an essential part of the prisoners' rations.

From the outset, but especially in 1940 after the campaign in France, complaints reached Geneva in large numbers. The prisoners were suffering from shortage of food and clothing. The Conventions allowed anxious next-of-kin to make up postal parcels and thus provide their prisoners not merely with comforts from home, but with food to satisfy them for a few days, and with clothing to protect them from the cold. From France, dispatch was a simple matter; in the absence of any fighting zone, parcels could be sent direct, although restrictions made it increasingly difficult to make up adequate consignments. From overseas, it was a very different problem; conveyance through the front took a very long time. In their endeavours to find another route, people thought of Geneva. The International Committee began to receive numerous individual applications for help, both from prisoners of war and from their relatives. Numbers of these requests could be met, thanks to special donations for that purpose; but the Committee usually forwarded these applications to the next-of-kin, or to national welfare organizations, offering its services as intermediary. Consignments in kind and funds began to reach the Committee, which made up parcels and forwarded them to the camps.

Despite their great value, individual parcels sent direct to the camps or through Geneva were not sufficient. The difficulty of making up such parcels and of shipping them grew steadily.
The route they had to follow was often uncertain, and censorship always strict. Delays were endless, and there was much risk of loss or theft on the way. The number of prisoners now requiring constant help reached some millions. Parcels from home arriving after perhaps some three months, followed by a second some weeks later, and shared with so many comrades who would never get any help at all, were clearly inadequate. The men must be fed at once, and regularly.

A way had to be found of sending relief supplies on a larger scale, and of building up stocks on which to draw. The answer lay in Article 78 of the Convention, which allows the action of relief societies "having for their object to serve as intermediaries for charitable purposes". What was the idea behind this Article which appeared for the first time in the Hague Regulations? It was then the expression of an extremely lofty conception of the Red Cross principle. Those who framed it had in mind, in the first place, the welfare societies of the Detaining Power, acting in behalf of enemy prisoners of war. So absolute an idea of charity has not often been translated into action. Apart from a few cases in which local Red Cross branches have supplied passing convoys of prisoners, only one or two occasions could be quoted on which relief was given on any appreciable scale to enemy nationals. Besides, to what section of the population could a Red Cross Society, anxious to undertake such relief work, turn for money and supplies sufficient to ensure, not momentary aid, but a large part of the essential provisioning of millions of enemy prisoners during several years?

In all belligerent countries, Red Cross Societies were absorbed by their primary duties: the Army Medical Service, and at home, work in hospitals, the care of convalescents and disabled. In so far as they could undertake any additional work in behalf of prisoners, their thoughts turned first to their own nationals in enemy hands, and to the help they could give them.

Article 78 seems to permit Red Cross Societies to enter enemy territory, in order to distribute relief supplies. This had been done, to a certain extent, during the first World War; but in the last War, no welfare associations, not even Red Cross Societies, were in practice allowed to cross the fighting zone.
Furthermore, the senders of collective relief were unwilling to entrust the issue of food-parcels to the welfare societies of the Detaining Power, even if they worked under the emblem of the Red Cross.

Why this twofold veto on the services of the Red Cross Society of the opposing side? Surely, the emblem under which these societies acted offered sufficient guarantee of their doing neutral work, either as agents in enemy territory or on behalf of the enemy, in the execution of a humanitarian task. The above attitude certainly involved a step in the wrong direction. It might be explained, but not excused, by the nature of the war. In each country the entire nation was, in varying degrees, enlisted in the war effort. The enemy was not merely an army, but an entire nation, seen in every citizen wherever he might be, in every institution of whatever kind. As auxiliaries of the Army Medical Service, National Red Cross Societies are necessarily connected in war-time with the military authorities of their country. Some of them are at all times linked by their charter or statutes to the Government.

What was required, therefore, was a neutral intermediary, who might be acceptable to both sides. Such is the distinctive nature of the International Committee. No Convention, be it remembered, called upon it to play this part in relief work; but its position, its former achievements and the establishment of the Agency allowed it to act usefully in this field.

Negotiations began—to gain approval, first of its intervention, and then of a plan of action. It is not enough that relief supplies and a neutral intermediary should be available. Food and medical supplies had to be shipped from the country which furnished them, cross the fighting zones and be received in the country to which they were sent. The war was not a war of armed forces only; it was economic, too. Blockade and counter-blockade were weapons to cripple the enemy, if not to bring him to his knees. Blockade regulations were strictly enforced—so strictly indeed that an exception was not readily granted even to help fellow-nationals who had fallen into enemy hands. Governments, Red Cross Societies, the prisoners’
next of kin were all anxious to send relief to the captives. This humanitarian and patriotic enterprise might, however, weaken the effect of the blockade, since so many goods would enter enemy territory. Even if the enemy did not profit by them direct, he might find pretext therein to reduce still further the already inadequate rations in the camps.

In consequence, the Allies allowed relief to be sent only to camps in which the Committee was able to exercise effective control of issue. One can understand this restriction up to a certain degree; but it remained a sore point, for it offered one of the most serious obstacles the Committee encountered in its endeavours to assist other war-victims than the prisoners and internees to whom it had access.

On the other hand, the Detaining Power sometimes saw little advantage in encouraging such relief work. Though the extra supplies were useful in maintaining millions of prisoners, and increased the output of the workers, they put an additional strain on railway systems and means of transport already overtaxed by military demands and damaged by air raids. Besides, as the economic situation of the Axis countries grew worse, wholesale consignments of scarce foodstuffs, comforts, clothing and shoes for prisoners of war excited growing discontent among the camp guards and the population. To meet such complaints, the German authorities often had to point out that prisoners of war in Allied hands enjoyed similar privileges.

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Overcoming such obstacles was not all. The principle having been accepted, the actual relief work still had to be done; in other words, yet more difficulties had to be surmounted. This was no small matter, as the reader will see. It was a question of conveying, through blockade and counter-blockade, supplies which the Red Cross Societies of the Allied countries provided for their nationals; of transporting these supplies to Switzerland and storing them before despatch to Germany and Italy; and lastly, of issuing them in the camps, according to the wishes of the donors, and at regular intervals. For some nationalities,
this involved moving as much as eleven pounds of foodstuffs and comforts per man weekly, besides clothing and medical supplies. Leaving the French and Russians out of consideration, Allied prisoners of war in Germany and Italy totalled some two million. After deducting the men who were liberated or turned into civilian workers, there were still a million Frenchmen. It was found theoretically possible, until the spring of 1944, to feed these prisoners direct from France, but supplies were scanty and transport often irregular. A large part of the relief had to come from overseas, and consequently pass like the rest through Geneva.

The only ports by which goods coming from overseas could reach Switzerland were Genoa and Marseilles, which were closed to the Allies. Even neutral vessels could not approach them without danger. It was therefore decided to concentrate supplies in Lisbon, a neutral port, and to forward them from there to Marseilles or Genoa. For this purpose it was necessary to find shipping, and to persuade the owners to let the vessels sail into the Mediterranean, then controlled by the Axis Powers.

Further negotiations by the Committee led belligerents to agree that the protection strictly confined by the Geneva Conventions to hospital-ships, should be extended to cargo-vessels carrying relief supplies. As a preliminary condition, it was laid down that the ships must be the property of neutrals, and sail under the strict supervision of the Committee's convoying agents on board; further, notification of sailing and route were to be given six days beforehand. The Committee's delegation in Lisbon soon became a vast shipping agency. The Committee chartered vessels and signed on crews in steadily increasing numbers. Thanks to an organization formed in Switzerland ¹, it even became itself the owner of three cargo-vessels. All these ships not only made the shuttle service between Lisbon and Marseilles or Genoa, but on many occasions sailed as far as the United States and Canada, to load supplies at their

¹ The Foundation for Red Cross Transports, at Basle.
source. At a time when transport by sea was only effected in strongly protected convoys, when monthly communiqués spoke of hundreds of thousands of tons torpedoed and sent to the bottom, small steamers crossed the ocean singly and alone, with the emblem of the red cross as their only safeguard.

Prisoners and friends, here are parcels from home...

At Marseilles or Genoa, the goods had to be unloaded and forwarded overland. Fresh difficulties arose: freight cars were needed, and priority must be secured for the trains; and that in time of war or occupation, when rolling stock was scarce, and what remained was overworked or bombed. Few people realize that on the Marseilles-Geneva line alone, the goods moved by the International Committee equalled in bulk, for several years, all Switzerland's food imports from overseas.

Having safely reached Switzerland, supplies were not immediately despatched to the camps. Consignments arrived at irregular intervals; they had to be checked, sometimes packed afresh, and then sorted, ready for forwarding. Conditions of transport made it necessary to build up stocks in Switzerland on which to draw as need arose, so that the delivery programme could be followed. Warehouses were established in various parts of Switzerland and filled with huge and ever-changing dumps of parcels. Receiving, examining, reconditioning, sorting, despatching—all these activities of a big international shipping agency called for an increasing number of employees. As from a workshop the Central Agency had grown into a factory, so the small department which, in the autumn of 1939, handled the despatch of the first individual parcels, now took on the appearance of a large business concern, employing nearly eight hundred people.

One figure should suffice: sixty-six million parcels. On thirty-six million occasions, prisoners of war received from home the longed-for parcel which kept them alive. Many problems had however to be solved before these parcels reached the camps. The transport of thirty-six million parcels called for the services
of forty-five thousand freight cars. Until the end of 1944, the International Committee had no means of transport. Switzerland did all it could to help, but it is a very small country: its resources in rolling stock are not extensive. As for Germany and Italy, it can be imagined that the demands of war on several fronts, added to excessive wear and tear, and destruction, left but little for the service of enemy prisoners. In short, a daily struggle had to be waged all along the route to secure for the relief trains the priority to which they were entitled.

In the end, the trains managed to get through; but the question arose—how long would they do so? The increasingly systematic bombing of Germany and Italy made it clear that one day all traffic would be paralysed. As early as 1943, the Committee informed the Allies of its anxiety in this respect. It asked for freight cars to keep in reserve, for motor trucks and petrol for road transport, when the railways could no longer be used. For many months the Allies refused, fearing no doubt that they would be indirectly helping the enemy's transport.

This refusal might have cost the prisoners dear. As it was, Geneva had to wait until the German railway system was completely disorganized before obtaining, at the end of 1944, less than three hundred freight cars and four hundred motor trucks. It was high time. Already several camps had exhausted their food stocks. Before the advance of the Allies, hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war had been evacuated towards the interior of the country. These pitiful columns had to march on foot through the snow; without food, or prospect of obtaining any; a prey to hunger, cold and disease; sometimes a target for the bombs of their own air forces.

1 These ten-ton cars, as used in Europe, conveyed 450,000 tons of relief supplies. Most of the consignments were collective, and the total was the equivalent of ninety million single parcels weighing eleven pounds each.
The Committee hastily made up so-called "block-trains" in Switzerland and directed them towards the few regions of Germany which were still accessible by rail. There the Geneva motor trucks took over the supplies to convey them to the camps, or else to the columns of prisoners marching along the roads—when they could be located: More fleets of motor trucks set out direct from Switzerland and travelled by road right across Germany, and even to Czechoslovakia and Poland. Still others set out from Lübeck. As it grew steadily more difficult to convey supplies from Switzerland to the North German camps, part of the shipments from overseas had been landed, for some months past, at Gothenburg, in Sweden. Here a delegation of the International Committee, following the example of the Lisbon delegation, shipped the parcels to Lübeck, where they were taken over and issued to the camps by yet more delegates.

The story of the adventurous journeys made by the Committee's white motor trucks is worth telling. Their red crosses, scarcely visible from planes flying at two hundred and fifty miles an hour, did not always protect them against air attack. When we remember how many prisoners of war died of starvation and cold during these marches, we shudder at the idea of what would have happened on the high roads of Germany, and even in the camps, if the International Committee had not, by its unwearying insistence, finally obtained this small number of vehicles.

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Much is achieved when a prisoners' hunger is more or less satisfied, when his meagre jail food—everything about it, from its appearance to its issue suggesting that the man is a mere number in a herd—is eked out by the contents of a parcel, bursting with vitamins and calories, but also coming "from home". But there was more—health, too, had to be considered, both physical and mental.

1 Whole trains which were not broken up en route.
The Convention provides for the health of the body. Each camp must have its sick ward, each man the medical attention he may require. The Detaining Power bears the costs of treatment, including those of temporary artificial limbs. In this respect the Convention was fairly generally observed, at the outset, although many reports spoke of deficiencies, which were to increase later.

This side of the question was attended to by the Medical Department at Geneva. Since its formation in September 1939, this Department had, to begin with, a limited task only within the framework of the Agency. According to the Geneva Convention proper (Wounded and Sick), personnel exclusively engaged in removing, transporting and nursing the wounded and sick, including the auxiliaries and staff of Aid Societies, must be respected and protected in all circumstances. If they fall into enemy hands, they may not be treated as prisoners of war, but must be repatriated as soon as circumstances allow (Art. 9 and 12).

The Medical Department turned its attention to the members of this so-called "protected personnel". It picked them out among the masses of prisoners. It tried to ensure their repatriation; when the shortage of doctors and orderlies involved their detention in camps to nurse their compatriots, the Committee tried to have them treated as far as possible in agreement with the spirit of the Convention. This task was heavier than had been anticipated, owing to the many enquiries and other steps which it entailed. From 1941 onwards, some Detaining Powers experienced such difficulty in supplying the camp infirmaries that the Medical Department had also to undertake the unexpected work of despatching medical relief supplies. There was a frequent shortage of medicaments, particularly of special patents. Enquiries were made locally, in Switzerland and in other neutral countries. Supplies were finally obtained from the home countries, like the food parcels. But in a world in which essential goods were becoming scarce, it was most difficult always to find exactly what was required, and in

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1 161,000 members of this personnel were traced.
sufficient quantities, too. Prostheses were asked for everywhere. The Committee purchased artificial legs and arms, or had them manufactured for the account of the home countries. The greatest demand was for artificial teeth. Owing to the camp food, caries and other dental trouble spread rapidly, with their usual bad effects on health. There were not enough dentists in the camps, nor sufficient equipment. With the help of sets of instruments and appliances furnished by National Red Cross Societies, sixty-four dental surgeries were completely fitted out in the camps of Germany. The Joint Relief Commission assisted in a collection of artificial teeth. Spectacles, too, were collected, both lenses and frames, to allow the men who had lost theirs to read and see clearly, nevertheless.

All these goods, from the simplest artificial tooth to the bottle of patent medicine, were invaluable. There were millions of prisoners, so wastage could not be permitted. It was not therefore a matter of wholesale consignment. The goods had to be sorted, classified, and stocked, with all the care of the skilled expert, so that the right articles could be sent, and sent quickly, from Geneva to each camp, according to specific requirements.

Intellectual and spiritual needs are also covered by the Convention, but only in a general way. Men whose minds are occupied by their job, can at a pinch do without reading matter. But there are many others. No Detaining Power can be expected to find enough books to instruct, amuse and cheer so many men in so many languages. Several agencies turned their attention to this problem, and it was in close co-operation with various societies, particularly with the World Alliance of Y.M.C.A.—it is quite impossible to say how much the prisoners owed to this organization—that the Committee's Intellectual Relief Section endeavoured to meet, as far as might be, such applications. Thus, one and a half million books, up to the end of the War, had been sorted, classified, selected, frequently repaired or rebound in Geneva, and forwarded to the camps.

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The war was indeed total. A well-constructed and hermetically sealed "fighting zone", which engines of death alone were able to cross. Yet, day after day, by repeated and untiring efforts, the Red Cross succeeded in its *tour de force*, and managed to convey through, to the other side, thirty-six million parcels, quantities of medicaments, vast libraries—in short, life and hope.

And it all went through a tiny rent in the armoured curtain—Geneva.
TRYING TO FIND A WAY IN

At this point it may perhaps be asked: "All this is about prisoners of war only. What about civilians? What happened to them? Beneath the blows and reactions of war, at the mercy of bombs, ill-treatment, starvation and epidemics, these millions of men, women and children who died like dumb animals—think of children dying like animals!—were also human beings. What was done for them? What did the International Committee, in its own field, actually do for them?"

That is a fair and also an important question. Another question however, should be asked first: "What was the International Committee in a position to do for these people?"

Theoretically, nothing at all. The Committee's task as intermediary depended on agreement between the belligerents, on existing conventions, or on particular arrangements. For prisoners there was the 1929 Convention, which recognized to the Committee one definite duty, the Central Agency, and offered certain opportunities of which the Committee availed itself. But for civilians there was nothing of the kind. There were the Hague Regulations respecting the laws and customs of war on land, which must suffice for them. It was true that these Regulations date from the year 1907—almost the age of chivalry: we have made good progress since then...—and that their adaptation to modern warfare did not go beyond "persons carrying despatches by balloon". The Regulations include a
few provisions directly or indirectly affecting civilians: undefended towns, villages and buildings must not be attacked or shelled; in other cases, the enemy commander must give previous notice to the garrison of his intention to begin bombardment. For occupying troops it is said: "Family honour and rights, the lives of persons, and private property, as well as religious convictions and practice, must be respected... No general penalty, pecuniary or otherwise, shall be inflicted upon the population on account of the acts of individuals for which they cannot be regarded as jointly and severally responsible".

The ruins of Rotterdam, Coventry, Dresden and Hiroshima, of a thousand other towns and tens of thousands of villages, the Oradours and the Lidices of France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Ukraine, Jugoslavia and elsewhere, are evidence of the esteem in which this time-honoured document is held.

What could then be done? Nothing. This was not through any lack of interest on the part of the Red Cross. The experience of 1914-1918 had made it clear that, in the event of another war, the civilian population would be involved, chiefly as victims. Since 1920 the International Committee had been giving close attention to this matter. In its turn, the International Red Cross Conference of 1929 expressed the unanimous recommendation that an International Convention should be prepared "concerning the condition and protection of enemy civilians resident in the territory of a belligerent or in territory occupied by him". The Conference invited the International Committee to take all necessary steps to secure the implementing of this recommendation. The Tokyo Conference of 1934 approved the draft Convention drawn up by the International Committee and a commission of experts.

The Red Cross proposes, but Governments dispose. On September 2, 1939, Governments had not yet disposed.

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Despite the absence of any convention, might it perhaps be possible to make provisional arrangements on the basis of the
Tokyo Draft? This Draft was no improvised affair. It had been maturing for a long time, and National Red Cross Societies, which had endorsed it, constitute an aspect of public opinion in their various countries. Moreover, representatives of the States party to the Geneva Conventions were present at the Tokyo Conference as full members. It might seem then that, although not yet sanctioned as a legal instrument by a Diplomatic Conference, the Draft enjoyed the moral support of Governments, when war broke out.

The hope proved vain. When the International Committee invited the belligerents to undertake to implement the Tokyo Draft, the suggestion met with but scant support. This indifference, which proved big with consequences, did not discourage the Committee. Principles are mightier than parchments. No institution working under the Red Cross can approve any argument tending to show that civilian war victims are not made of the same flesh and blood as combatants, or that they may lawfully be robbed of the minimum of dignity and sustenance which any wounded or sick combatant, or prisoner of war enjoys, since he is now regarded, despite his uniform, simply as human being.

The International Committee demanded as a minimum concession that interned civilians should rank with prisoners of war, and that the 1929 Convention on Prisoners of War should be applied to them by analogy.

On this point, the Committee met with better success. Most of the belligerents agreed to extend the benefits of the said Convention to civilian internees. Here, terms must be defined. A "civilian internee" is not any civilian shut up in a camp by the enemy. He is an alien resident in enemy territory when war is declared, and who is immediately arrested, merely on account of his nationality. Thus, on September 3, 1939, all German citizens living in France, or simply travelling through France were interned, while all Frenchmen who were in Germany or in the countries under its control met with similar treatment.

1 The only reply which was not flatly negative came from Germany!
This measure is of recent origin; it was unknown in the days when war was a purely military affair. It made its appearance in 1914 and soon became general. This fact is due to the character of modern warfare: although they are simply civilians, enemy aliens are potential combatants. If left at liberty, they could return home to swell enemy ranks or give valuable information; or they might remain on the spot and constitute a "fifth column". It is therefore allowable to try and render them harmless.

Civilian internees were thus, from the humanitarian point of view, put on the same footing as prisoners of war, and the task of the International Committee was proportionately increased. Everything which has already been said about the Agency—visits to camps, issue of relief—applies, mutatis mutandis, to this class of detainees. Many particular problems arose however, which the Committee endeavoured to solve. For instance, men alone were interned, as a rule; since they drew no allowances, their wives and children usually became the prey of dire distress. The Committee came to their aid, either by means of direct relief, or by securing the establishment of family camps.

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So far, a success, it is true, but only a partial success. Civilian Internees were only one of the two classes referred to in the Tokyo Draft. They were comparatively few in number, whereas the other civilians who were to fall into enemy hands through the successive occupation of a dozen European countries and numerous foreign possessions, numbered tens of millions.

They included the civilians arrested by the invader, forcibly deported and thrust into concentration camps. We shall not attempt to describe their fate, which has been told a thousand times. On that subject, the reader can give free rein to his imagination; he will always fail to visualize stark reality.

The International Committee's attempts to assist these deportees met with polite but categorical refusal. "We are
extremely sorry... but these people are not civilian internees. They are suspects, arrested for security reasons.” The security of the State! The explanation, in itself, was valid—so valid indeed that it proved a very useful instrument in the hands of a Government which was waging total war, and which the conquest of half Europe already led to expect the speedy achievement of equally total victory—an end which, so it thought, would justify every means employed. It could label “security measure” the arrest of entire populations, if that suited its purpose; and none could say it nay. So, day after day, month after month, year after year, long trains of cattle-trucks conveyed the victims of these “security measures” away towards Germany. If they had the good, or ill fortune to reach their destination alive, they were swallowed up in camps which were more distant from the rest of the world than any desert island.

Let us suppose that Henry Dunant and the women of Solferino, anxious to take help into one of the churches crowded with dying and wounded, had been stopped by armed sentries: “Halt! No admittance”.—“But we have come to nurse the wounded!”—“The wounded are under military authority; they are no concern of you civilians. Keep away!”—“Won’t you at least yourselves give this food and these medical supplies to these unhappy men?”—“No; our orders forbid”.

What could they have done? They might have gone away, regretfully, but with a clear conscience, since there was “no admittance”; or they might have stayed on, trying to persuade the guard to relent, and if rebuffed, to stay on nevertheless; to watch for an opportunity; to look for an opening, a broken window-pane perhaps, through which to slip drugs and food into the building, or perhaps a mere crack, through which to whisper words of comfort and of hope.

Such was the dilemma in which the German Government’s refusal placed the International Committee. In these circumstances, the latter might have said to the belligerents: “Before the war, a Convention was placed before you, but you did not adopt it. When war came, we asked you to apply it all the
same, but you have not done so. Now the doors are shut upon us, and we can do no more”.

The International Committee might have spoken thus, but it chose the other way, that of the broken window-pane, and it never ceased in its attempts to persuade the sentries, that is the German Government, to relent. The Central Agency, beset with a host of applications from next-of-kin, tried to obtain the addresses, or at least some news, of the deportees. All attempts were vain. The Committee succeeded in winning the interest and the co-operation of the German Red Cross. But this National Society itself, despite obvious good will, was helpless in the face of “security measures”. It only succeeded in supplying a very few particulars. As to everyone else, the concentration camps were hermetically sealed to the National Society.

The Committee tried to enter, nevertheless. Without flagging, its delegates took up the matter, again and again. Once, but once only, after a year’s struggle, they were allowed to visit a camp: the town of Terezin ¹. Not the fortress of evil memory, but only the town, which was to be a model ghetto. At Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, they penetrated as far as the camp office quarters, but could not enter the camp itself, for they must not be allowed to see what nobody must see.

The gates were certainly well guarded; the sentries were inflexible; “no admittance”. In 1943, however, they agreed to pass on any relief supplies sent to the deportees—any supplies, that is, which were addressed directly to individuals by name. In other words, none at all, since the authorities still refused to furnish any information, and the exact addresses of deportees known in Geneva scarcely totalled one hundred.

Never mind; Geneva would try all the same. Parcels should be sent to the few “privileged” detainees whose whereabouts were known. For their part, the Committee’s delegates were instructed to redouble their efforts, and to try by every means to wrest a few names from the camp commandants.

A first consignment of parcels for individual detainees was

¹ In Czechoslovakia. As a concentration camp it is better known by the German name of Theresienstadt.
despatched 1. It brought a great surprise: receipts came back, duly signed. Another surprise followed: some of the receipts bore not only the signature of the addressee, but also the names of five, ten, perhaps fifteen fellow-detainees. The Committee grasped the point: every fresh name meant a fresh address to which parcels could be sent. If only the snowball grew, if only delegates or unknown friends sent further lists or addresses, the work could develop. If only—steady, not so fast! Who would provide the supplies? The Allies were certainly willing, but there was the blockade, their own blockade regulations: nothing could pass through the cordon, except supplies for camps where the Committee's representatives were in a position personally to supervise distribution. The blockade prevented the Committee from importing from overseas a single pound of food for the deportees, from arranging for the transfer to Geneva of a single halfpenny, so as to buy in Switzerland or other neutral countries the supplies needed for food-parcels. Work had scarcely begun; the broken window-pane had just been found and one or two things had been slipped through; must it all stop for lack of supplies? The Committee tried elsewhere; it succeeded in obtaining funds and having them transferred, thus enabling the purchase in Axis countries, Hungary, Rumania and Slovakia, of valuable foodstuffs, which allowed parcels to be made up in Geneva.

Thus, little by little, as a result of much labour and effort, seven hundred and fifty thousand individual parcels left for the concentration camps. An infinitesimal figure, compared to the total number of deportees; but it is enormous, if one remembers that nothing at all was allowed to go through, and if one takes into account all the political, economic and practical obstacles which had to be overcome, even when it was at last possible to send anything at all. In the summer of 1944, although relief for individual detainees only was permitted, the International Committee took a final risk: it dispatched collective consignments to the camps which were known to exist. For

1 In the autumn of 1943.
lack of permits or means of supervision, these parcels might very well never reach the deportees. The risk had to be taken, however slender the chances of success.

Nineteen hundred and forty-five: the end of the nightmare was drawing near, but conditions were growing even worse. Germany was on the verge of collapse: railway communications were failing, food transports were almost impossible. In certain leading circles, the state of mind was such that wholesale exterminations might well be feared at the last minute. The Committee's endeavours redoubled, and its chairman himself travelled to Germany. One after another, concessions were laboriously secured—although circumstances sometimes made it impossible to take advantage of them. Food supplies: the white motor-trucks, already mentioned, were to call at certain concentration camps. Exchange of detainees; release of women and sick: the same trucks would convey a number of detainees from the camps—as many as they could take, thirty or forty in each truck on each journey. Little enough, but after all, it meant that several thousand people were released and brought to Switzerland, sometimes in unbelievable conditions. Lastly, some degree of protection was to be allowed: permission was extorted at the eleventh hour for the Committee to send representatives to certain camps, on condition that these men should agree to act as genuine hostages, and stay shut up there until the liberation. It is now known that this daring step saved tens of thousands of detainees from mass extermination.

Therefore, it can not be said that the most formidable Bastille in history was erected in defiance of humanity, without any one being found who would steadfastly seek, and if need be, tear open, as it were with bare hands, a tiny passage through which a ray of light and hope might enter.

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Concerning the sufferings of the Jews, we shall say no more than about those of the deportees. Instead, let us study the
factual problem and see what could be done, if opportunity offered. The matter was quite simple: the Jews were behind the same trebly-bolted gates as the non-Jewish deportees; they too, were imprisoned as a "security measure", the sole difference being that the sentries were better armed; therefore, attempts at persuasion must be still more tactful, and search for the broken window-pane yet more cautious.

Germany, followed by the other Axis countries, had enacted special legislation relative to the Jews. A new class of citizen, subjected to new laws, had been created: the Jew. Beyond the test of nationality, which Germany abolished even for its own citizens, the law sought another, that of race. Members of the Jewish race were placed in a fresh category of humanity, a second-rate category if you like, to which common law was no more applicable than it was to domestic animals. This legislation was the expression of the Government's general policy—a policy based on the official biological theory of the State. Consequently, to meddle with a Jew, for whatever reason, was to meddle with the whole Jewish question, that is to say with the internal laws and policy of a sovereign State.

It is true that the International Committee, being a neutral organization, cannot interfere in the internal affairs of any State. But it is also an independent organization, and therefore no internal legislation of any State can modify the Committee's conception of the principles for which it stands. The Red Cross recognizes neither nationality, nor colour, nor race, nor creed; it sees human beings only. If, therefore, the International Committee had the slightest chance of doing something for Jewish civilians, it would make the attempt. This task would tax its powers to the utmost, for it would have to make its own conceptions prevail in a sovereign country against the laws and policy of that country, and without affording the pretext of an irreparable breach.

It may be thought that there was too much diplomacy in all this; that in any case nothing much could be done, and that things being so, it would have been better to enter violent protest and leave the conference table. All relief work would
have been stopped, of course, but at least, the world would have known the reason why.

Perhaps... but what would have happened next?

If help for the Jews had been the only cause which the International Committee was called upon to serve during the war, such a course, which would have put honour before the saving of life, might have been contemplated. But such was not the case. Relief for Jews, like relief for deportees, rested on no juridical basis. No convention provided for it, nor gave the International Committee even the shadow of a pretext for intervention. On the contrary, conditions were all against such an undertaking. Chances of success depended entirely on the consent of the Powers concerned. And there were all the other tasks, which the Conventions or time-honoured tradition permitted the International Committee to undertake, or which, with so great difficulty, it had succeeded in adding thereto. To engage in controversy about the Jewish question would have imperilled all this work, without saving a single Jew.

Such were the circumstances in which, through negotiations and spontaneous initiatives, in face of the practical difficulties and risks which they implied, the Committee and its delegates succeeded, here and there, in relieving the lot of the Jews. Those who were in concentration camps were included in the relief undertakings described above. For others who were not in the camps yet, the Committee obtained the temporary suspension, which saved several thousands, of mass deportations from Hungary to Germany. The Committee's delegates explored every possible avenue: issue of relief in Rumania to one hundred thousand Jews detained in camps; practically permanent feeding of two hundred thousand Jews who were not interned; distribution, at Budapest, of 30,000 letters of protection, in other words, rescue of 30,000 Jews; establishment of homes where 3,000 children found refuge and food; soup-kitchens; the distribution, often at considerable personal risk, of food, clothing and money to the Jews of Hungary, Rumania and Slovakia. All these relief schemes, and the sometimes very difficult purchases which they involved, were made possible
by the generous support of the American Joint Distribution Committee and other Jewish organizations, which put at the Committee’s disposal over 22 million Swiss francs.

Lastly, in one way and another, individually or in groups, several thousands more of these unhappy people were saved from the fate which awaited them.

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The story of the sufferings endured by the civilian populations would fill many volumes, and on every page the same words would recur: “Persecution; bombardment; starvation; sickness; death.”

We have seen what was done for the persecuted, whether Jewish or not. Now let us see what could, or could not be done for the rest.

Bombardments... It is well known how the air raids tested, in many countries, the devotion to duty of National Societies: the number of killed and wounded grew steadily, and the means of helping them were often destroyed at the same time.

For the Red Cross also, whose task it is to alleviate suffering, prevention is better than cure. As early as 1934, the Red Cross was interested in the problem of juridical protection against air bombardment. The International Red Cross Conference at Tokyo, in 1934, invited the International Committee and National Societies to approach Governments, “to stimulate their efforts with a view to the early implementing of all measures tending to protect both wounded and sick combatants, and the civilian population”.

In obedience to these instructions, which were renewed by the International Conference held in London in 1938, the Committee convened two commissions of experts. The meetings of the first of these led to a Preliminary Draft. But the thorny military problems raised by this question, coupled with the apathy of Governments, prevented any rapid progress. It was found necessary to proceed by stages, taking the wounded and sick combatants first. If this preliminary step were made, it would be easier to secure consent for treaty protection to be
extended to certain sections of the civilian population. Thus, a fresh Draft, drawn up by the second commission in October 1938, was submitted to Governments by the International Committee. War began before the Diplomatic Conference, which was to study it, could meet.

The scheme was still confined to the establishment of hospital zones reserved for the use of the Army Medical Services, and to the adaptation of the specific protection accorded by the Red Cross—originally designed for medical units and establishments adequate for battles within a limited area—to the proportions of modern warfare, which carries the fight to any point in the enemy's territory.

On September 9, 1939, however, when the Committee invited belligerents to implement what was no more than the 1938 Draft, it went from the outset a good deal further. It raised the question of establishing localities and zones of security for the protection of certain categories of the civilian population. It returned to the subject a month later. In 1940, the Committee recalled the principles of international law. Its efforts failed, however, to rouse the Governments concerned from their indifference.

On March 15, 1944, when aerial warfare was reaching its murderous paroxysm, the Committee issued a last appeal to belligerents. The appeal was accompanied by concrete proposals for the creation of protected zones, both for wounded and sick combatants, and for the civilian wounded and sick, for children, old people, expectant and nursing mothers. Again, the attitude of the Powers was on the whole negative. The reply made by a few Governments was favourable in principle, but none took the slightest step towards giving effect to the Committee's proposals.

The lives of a few hundred thousand more or less matter very little, compared with the "military necessities" of total warfare.

Starving populations... At first sight it does not appear why the Committee should take action in this connection. The food

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supply of the occupied countries was the responsibility of the occupants and of the local authorities, if any such remained. Any additional relief work is the concern of national organizations, Red Cross or other societies. Neighbouring or allied countries can help each other, and recourse to a neutral, perhaps distant intermediary is not indispensable.

Indispensable or not, the International Committee could not remain indifferent to such tragic happenings, if in any way it might be able to give some degree of relief.

Things began in the autumn of 1940, when appeals reached Geneva, asking for immediate help. Without resources of its own, the Committee set about calling for relief supplies and helping in their despatch. In the early winter of 1941-1942 a disastrous famine swept over Greece. Several thousands died every day, and the health of the whole nation seemed threatened for a generation. The Turkish Red Crescent offered supplies, and the Committee's representative opened a chain of soup kitchens. These issued 800,000 meals daily. Supplies were then found in Switzerland and in the Balkan countries. Eight hundred thousand helpings of soup a day was only a beginning; the famine would probably last until the end of the war, and something more must be done. The countries of Europe were themselves ruined by occupation or in difficulties on account of the blockade, and could not meet the need. Seconded by Sweden, which was anxious to help in saving Greece, the Committee appealed successfully to the Allies. The blockade was lifted in respect of Greece; relief committees were formed, notably in America, to raise funds; Canada supplied the wheat, Sweden furnished shipping and delegates. The work spread rapidly, until monthly shipments from Canada to the Piraeus amounted to 15,000 tons of wheat and 3,000 tons of other supplies.

As is well known, the Allies insisted on strict supervision of

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1 Although the emblem of the red cross on a white ground has no religious significance—it was chosen as a compliment to Switzerland, since the colours of the Swiss flag are interchanged—some non-Christian countries adopted another distinctive emblem: a red crescent, a red lion and sun. National Societies serving under these symbols are recognised as National Red Cross Societies, and as such form part of the International Red Cross.
all consignments allowed to go through the blockade. An administra­tive Relief Commission for Greece, including delegates of the International Committee and of the Swedish Government, checked the supplies through every stage of their journey, from the time they reached the Piraeus until they were issued in the remotest villages, after passing through the flour-mills, bakeries and distribution centres which the Commission had to build, equip and manage. Close on five thousand assistants were engaged, until after the liberation of the country, UNRRA and the Greek War Relief were in a position to take over.

The special case of the Greek famine called forth special action; but there were other occupied countries besides Greece in which destruction and disorganization were endangering the food supply. They were suffering from the effects of the blockade. As the war dragged on, they saw the occupation forces not only living on the produce of their soil, but also sending more and more of this produce to their own countries. Although not yet as critical as in Greece, the situation of these countries was serious. Appeals for help became even more pressing.

Large scale activities of long duration had to be planned. The International Committee decided to make a special appeal to National Societies through their federation, the League of Red Cross Societies. Since the League's regular contact with these Societies put it in a position to enlist their resources, the Committee invited the League to co-operate in its own endeavours to send food to the civilian populations. A common organization was set up in Geneva, known as the Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross, to which National Societies, a number of other welfare associations and certain Governments handed over the donations in money and in kind which they desired to send to the civilian populations of Europe.

Several publications of the Joint Commission have already

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1 This Commission assumed its final form in March 1943, under a Swedish chairman. The relief work was placed under the auspices of the International Committee. Before the arrival of the first Swedish delegates in September 1942, distributions were supervised by an organization set up by the Committee, and composed of its delegates and well-known Greek citizens.
given an idea of the working of this organization. The final Report, now in preparation, will make it possible to judge of the scope of its work, which was to close down at the end of 1946.

From its formation until the end of hostilities in Europe, supplies from overseas or purchased in Switzerland and South East Europe, and issued to the population in France, Belgium, Poland, Jugoslavia, Holland and Norway amounted to thirty-six thousand tons, valued at a hundred and fifty million Swiss francs. Pursuing its work in the liberated countries since May 8, 1945, and extending it to Germany, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria, the Joint Commission has raised these figures to one hundred and thirty thousand tons and three hundred and forty million francs.

The International Committee and the Joint Commission were in daily touch with each other; the latter, indeed, could not proceed alone, action by the Committee remaining indispensable. The Allied Powers allowed no exception to the blockade regulations, unless all supplies were checked, from the transfer of foodstuffs and funds until actual distribution, to prevent any benefit accruing to the Axis Powers. For that purpose the help of a neutral intermediary was necessary, and the International Committee was the best qualified, since it already enjoyed the Allies' confidence in respect of other relief undertakings. On their part, the Axis Powers could only permit such action if they were assured, thanks to this intermediary, that supplies bought in Rumania, a country controlled by them, would benefit the right people, i.e. the civilian population, and not the partisans who were rebelling against their domination.

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Deportees, Jews, starving populations...
In what golden age, on what happy planet lived those plenipotentiaries who, scarcely forty years ago, deliberately signed the Hague Regulations relative to the laws and customs war on land...

"Family honour and rights, the lives of persons, and private property, as well as religious convictions and practice must be respected" (Article 46).
Chapter VII

DIFFICULTIES

"One's sense of being quite unable to cope with such an extraordinary situation in unspeakably painful".

Henry Dunant

(A Memory of Solferino)

Throughout the preceding chapters, the difficulties that hindered the progress of the International Committee have been described or suggested. It will repay to linger over them for a moment.

On learning what was done by the Agency or in the sphere of relief, the idea may arise that all these undertakings were perfectly natural. Is not that the International Committee's purpose? On hearing of a fresh disaster, people immediately ask: "Isn't the International Committee doing something?" Or they indignantly exclaim: "They're doing nothing—scandalous!"

Take one example among a hundred. In August 1944, Warsaw was in full revolt; the wireless stated that one hundred thousand inhabitants had been assembled by the Germans at Pruszkow, and were in a pitiable condition. The International Committee at once appealed to the Allied Red Cross Societies for relief supplies, and approached the German authorities and Red Cross for the permits and help necessary to get the supplies through and to send a delegate. The Joint Relief Commission loaded and dispatch ten railways cars. But the journey was long; so permission was asked and obtained for
other cars, then on their way to Cracow, to be diverted from their route in order to take emergency relief to Pruszkow. Meanwhile, scarcely had the name of Pruszkow camp been mentioned in the press, when without taking the trouble to enquire in Geneva, a general outcry was started. A big newspaper asked: "What is the International Red Cross doing about this? Why don't they send a food plane?"

Very simple, of course; one merely had to think of it.

The Committee had thought of it. They had suggested to the belligerents to send food supplies to Pruszkow, not in one single plane, but in a whole squadron. The suggestion fell on deaf ears. In wartime, not everyone who wants to fly can do so. The military obstacles were stated to be insurmountable. But, while the Red Cross food-cars were trailing towards Poland on crowded or damaged railway lines, dozens of allied bombers from both East and West were daily flying over the capital dropping bombs on the attackers, parachuting food and arms for the insurgents. How many of them, as they flew by, were ordered to drop supplies at Pruszkow, a dozen miles away? Not a single one.

"Why not simply do this or that?" People who talked thus were well intentioned, but ill-informed. They ignored one thing: war exists for the International Committee too. The Committee, a neutral body in a neutral country, is of course not in the war. It is to this fact that it owes its power to act. But in all its work, at every step, it comes up against all the manifestations of war—all, from the closed frontier to the bombs which destroy its delegations, the machine-guns which kill and wound its representatives, and the torpedoes which sink food-cargoes, crews and convoying agents. The prisoners argued: "Our Government is paying; where are the parcels?", and failed to understand any delay in the issue of supplies. They did not, and could not know that their own country's bombers had cut all lines of communication. Again, some particular Government asked the Committee to transfer funds and expressed extreme surprise that this was not done quickly enough, or at a sufficiently favourable rate of exchange. Yet that Government should have understood the reason why: at that very
moment, its own economic blockade regulations forbade even the International Committee to issue to enemy aliens interned in its own territory the financial aid which their home country wanted to furnish them.

Books about the war have often described the complicated operations, the time and work represented by the dropping of a bomb; from the making of the bomb and the plane, the oil-refining and transport over seas, to the final flight and aim at the target. The story of a relief parcel, from its packing overseas to the moment of issue in camp would be just as instructive.

Practical difficulties were not the worst obstacles; there were many others, such as indifference, ill-will, lack of understanding, suspicion. When total war is deliberately let loose, when mass attacks are backed up by oppression, terror and scientific extermination—all under the pretext of shortening the war—and when the enemy, anxious to curtail the horror, adopts proportionate military and economic weapons, every step taken by the International Committee becomes almost a challenge.

A civilian message is a challenge to the official interruption of mail services, which, in a world suffering from chronic siege and spy mania, is a defensive weapon. A relief parcel is a challenge to the blockade, which is another weapon. A challenge to oppression, also used as a weapon, lies hidden in every cargo of wheat for a civilian population; a challenge to terror, used as a weapon, is the attempt to win for partisans the status of combatants; and a challenge to mass extermination, used as a weapon, is the opening of a home for Jewish children.

From the first bomb, dropped on Warsaw, to the last, which burst over Nagasaki, for six long years, day by day, the War was being "shortened". During this whole time the Committee was negotiating, organizing, labouring, and also finding among the belligerents, be it acknowledged, ears to hear, hearts to understand and hands to help.

One difficulty, and not the least, was the sense of incapacity to cope with such an extraordinary situation. However, far-reaching certain achievements of the Committee might be,
what were they, compared with the extent of the disaster, and its duration? It was impossible to do enough, impossible to "finish the job". No sooner was something achieved here, than a fresh calamity called one there. The feelings of the Committee sometimes resembled those of Sisyphus, condemned by the gods to hoist up a slope a heavy rock, which on reaching the top at once rolled down to the bottom. With this difference however, that while heaving its everlasting rock, the Sisyphus-Committee saw other rocks roll down which it must try to push up in their turn.

There was another difference: the International Committee was authorized to act, but not obliged to do so; it could have resigned, thrown in its hand and said, "Enough of this! Why should we wear ourselves out taking relief to prisoners, when the very instant we are given permission, they send thousands of planes to wipe out towns with thousands of bombs, and kill thousands of women and children? What is the use of visiting internment camps when ever-increasing masses of people are, at the same time, engulfed into other camps that will always be closed to us? Submarines make way before the Red Cross ship which transports food in an attempt to save a population from starvation, the better to strike and sink hundreds of vessels, so that other populations may starve. At last we may take news of their country to exiles from home... to tell them that their native towns have been wiped off the face of the earth. There is, it seems, no longer any sense in our efforts. By prolonging this paradox, shall we not finally become accomplices, and legalize, as it were, the horrors we seek to mitigate?"

Yet the work did mean something, after all. The Committee could not throw in its hand; if it had resigned, that would have made it an accomplice. Even if there was a risk that a time would come when nothing more could be done, the Committee was decided to persevere, if only to respond to the hopes of so many millions.

Critics objected: "At least, in view of certain too flagrant violations of humanitarian principles, you should have protested and appealed to world opinion."

Protest? The International Committee did protest—to the
responsible authorities. It had too many occasions to protest. A whole department of the Committee's work was to make one long series of protests; countless improvements in the camps, for example, were due to steps of this kind.

Public protest and denunciation would have been of no avail. No protests and no threats have ever changed methods of barbarism, or lessened the destructive power of modern weapons. It is the duty of each, according to his ability, work, or station, to oppose violations of law, by force if he can, by moral condemnation, by protest. Every man to his job, every man to his vocation. That of the Red Cross is to nurse the wounded where it can, with the means at its disposal. For the Committee to protest publicly would have been not only to outstep its functions, but also to lose thereby all chance of pursuing them, by creating an immediate breach with the Government concerned. The Committee would have thus abandoned to their fate the very people whom it wished to save.

The same critics observed further: "It would have been better for your prestige."

Prestige is an idea which does more often harm than good. The Committee's prestige is not worth the loss of a single human life—not one! Besides, no-one will ever be saved by the prestige of a welfare institution, but only by the prestige of the idea whose handmaid that institution must be. The prestige of the Red Cross idea lives not by words, but by deeds—by deeds which are, after all, the most eloquent of all protests.

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"With the means at its disposal." Let us consider again, in greater detail, the means of which the International Committee could dispose.

The Conventions, as we have seen, do not expressly provide it with any. They give it neither authority, nor means of compulsion, nor even a legal status. Governments may grant the Committee's representatives diplomatic visas or facilities for travel, but they do so at their discretion, according to their esteem for the Committee, or the extent to which its inter-
vention is to their interest. In this respect, the belligerents were, in general, understanding, favourable, and even anxious to help. War, however, has its unavoidable necessities, and belligerents have their own views. The International Committee could not always send as many delegates as it desired, nor to all places it wished. Where fifty men were needed, ten only were allowed. Elsewhere, as in Poland or Czechoslovakia during the German occupation, not a single one was admitted. Belligerents usually kept them waiting from six to ten weeks for permits and visas. Thus in 1944, when the situation in Germany demanded considerable strengthening of the delegation in that country, new delegates could only join up one by one. It was not until a few weeks before the end that the German consul in Geneva took it upon himself to grant visas, without waiting for authority from Berlin. The number of delegates was then raised to forty... forty for the whole of Germany, in April 1945, when all lines of communication were cut, when prisoners of war were turned out wholesale on to the high roads, and all government offices were scattered about the country. Forty, when four hundred would not have been too many!

** Independence and neutrality have always been prerequisites of the Committee's work; they are also means therefor. The Committee is a private association, recruiting its members by co-optation; it is subordinate to no other institution, not even to a Red Cross Society, nor to any Government, not even that of Switzerland. Its members, who are unpaid, are wholly independent. The fact that the work of Committee members was voluntary throughout the war is little known. It is more important, however, than one might think. An undertaking which occupies thousands of workers during several years, must necessarily have in addition to temporary or permanent voluntary helpers, the assistance of more or less trained regular staff. It matters little whether part or all of this staff is paid or not. What is really important is that those who constitute the "International Committee", who determine policy and
with whom decisions rest, should preserve for the institution that
disinterestedness which is both its originality and its strength.

Something must be said, too, about neutrality. During a
world-wide conflict, the term is rather at a discount; in the
minds of those who are absorbed body and soul by the war, it
is often synonymous with indifference, opportunism and self-
seeking. Such is not always the case, and it never applies to
the Red Cross.

Being a corporate body which is neutral as regards nationality,
with headquarters in Switzerland and composed of Swiss citizen
only, the Committee is able to maintain relations with all
countries. That is not enough; the Committee must be
effectively neutral in a twofold sense. First, it must be neutral
politically; it must never take sides in the conflict; it must
consider neither the causes nor the course of political and
military events, so as to see only the distress which they
engender. That is neither indifference, nor selfishness, nor
opportunism; it is a weapon, and the whole world expects the
International Committee to use it. Secondly, it must have the
specific neutrality of the Red Cross—neutrality in the presence
of distress. Such neutrality speaks to the sufferer: "I am
blind to the uniform you wear, and see only your wound, that
I may tend it. I am deaf to the language you speak, and hear
only your cry, that I may bring you comfort. I know not who
you are; I only know your distress."

Another virtue which is also a means, is impartiality. The
Committee must be at the service of all.

As the War spread, the Committee offered its services to all
belligerents. Not all accepted, not all made use of these services
in an equal degree, and not all granted the same facilities.
Hence the differences which have often been mistaken for
injustice. Is it Geneva's fault if one belligerent country is
more generous than another to its prisoners of war, if it
obeys more strictly to principles than its opponent? What
counts is the knowledge that the Committee is always ready, as
far as in it lies, to do for the one what it is doing for the other.
Lastly, among these "moral" means, if one may use the term, there is one which it might be preferable not to mention, but which was often a useful lever, namely, 

reciprocity.

When they signed, and later ratified the Geneva Conventions, the High Contracting Parties had in view the implementing of principles which they considered sacred, having their virtue in themselves and not in the advantages they might confer. Welfare Conventions are not reciprocal agreements, on a "fifty-fifty" basis. They are affirmations of principles, unconditional pledges. But war blunts the edge of many a principle, and more than once the Committee had to appeal to the principle of reciprocity, in order to secure amendments which the letter or the spirit of the Conventions should have provoked without its interference.

* * *

What about "human" means? These were simply ordinary men and women. The Red Cross could no more draw upon a reservoir of supermen than can any other institution. We must pause here, nevertheless, to speak of an instrument peculiar to the Committee: their delegations.

Geneva remained the centre; it constituted the focus of that intermediary agency between belligerents, which was the International Committee. Here we had the Agency, working like a regular factory or an organised hive, with the various divisions, whose activities we have described: among others the Prisoner, Internee and Civilian, Relief, Medical and Pharmaceutical Divisions; or general departments, such as Transport and Communications—the latter being engaged in a constant search for new routes, new means of transport and shipment, new channels for correspondence.

Further, the Finance Division, which dealt with contributions in behalf of war victims, and which collected and handled the funds required to keep this vast organisation at work. The goal of all this activity was the outer world, and it was the outer world which fed it. It was thus essential to keep in daily touch with Governments and National Red Cross
Societies. Representatives were needed in every country, men who could see and hear, go wherever events called them, and act on the spot. These men were the Committee's delegates.

We cannot here describe their work in detail. The reader may form some idea of it from what has been said about the Committee's own activities. It deserves particular mention because it had a place apart. At Geneva, work can be divided, and assistants can specialize. Indeed, this is essential because of the variety and scale of the services asked of the Committee and of its undertakings. The delegate, on the other hand, must know everything and do everything. At the outset, one or two men sufficed to visit the prisoner of war and internee camps, since these were still very few; reports to Geneva, linking up of camps with the Agency, making a few enquiries about individual men, maintaining contact with the authorities and the National Red Cross—all this was a straightforward job. Doctors were selected for preference. Soon, and especially after 1940, more delegates were needed in the countries most directly affected by the war; the variety as well as the amount of their work increased. Soon there were not enough medical men; other professional workers had to be enlisted in addition. Very soon all these men—doctors, lawyers, business experts—irrespective of their training and experience, had to turn their hand to anything: camp visits, issue of relief, individual cases, applications to authorities, negotiations; all these sometimes on their own responsibility. Try to imagine what it was to be a delegate, when every means of rapid communication with Geneva were temporarily cut off, and all kinds of problems had to be faced and decisions made, without knowing whether Geneva would approve or not. Think of the delegates in Germany during the last weeks of the war, of the representatives in distant lands, in the Far East, for example. The latter were enlisted locally; they had no certain means of communicating with Geneva, and were sometimes left without instructions; they were never supported by the local authorities, but were nearly always watched and suspected. Yet they persevered, despite threats, or even in face of the firing squad.
Courage, skill, tact, devotion, integrity—the job of delegate demanded every virtue and every kind of knowledge. They were but men, with the usual percentage of human weaknesses. But they had courage: nine died at their posts; one was executed, two were killed by hazards of war; others died as the result of accident or overwork.

Neither in Geneva nor in the delegations were there any supermen. Henry Dunant too, was only "an ordinary fellow". He was a solitary worker, and not a medical man. Yet, alone, he attended to one thousand wounded combatants. For it is true, that "the high thought of the importance of each single life, the anxiety to relieve in some small measure the tortures of so many, to revive their flagging courage, the arduous and ceaseless toil in which one engages at such moments—all these are sources of new and abounding energy, which creates an irresistible impulse to aid the greatest possible number" 1.

* * *

Let us turn to material means; for all these things cost money.

Before the war, the Committee, with its permanent secretariat, lived on a small budget of 130,000 Swiss francs a year. Two-thirds of this amount was covered by voluntary contributions from National Societies, and the rest by the income from a trust fund of one million francs. The reserve fund which the Committee had possessed was exhausted during the wars in the Chaco, Abyssinia, China and Spain. On September 1, 1939, it had nothing in hand except a loan of 200,000 Swiss francs from the Swiss Government and an equal sum which was hastily collected. Despite this penury of means, the Committee set about establishing the Agency and prepared itself for events. Once these initial funds were exhausted, its resources would depend on Governments, on National Societies and on the public, that is to say, on the interest taken in its work. At the end of 1945, the year when hostilities ceased, its work had cost

1 A Memory of Solferino.
45 million Swiss francs, more than half of which had been supplied by the Swiss Governorment and people. At that moment, its coffers were again empty.

Well, all those millions of francs given to the International Committee to enable it to do the work which has been described, how much did they represent? *Six hours of the war effort of all the belligerents.*

*Six years* for bombs, rifles, cannon, warships and planes—not to mention the rest.

*Six hours* for the Prisoners of War Agency, the civilian messages, the food-ships, the white motor-trucks—and all the rest.

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Such were the difficulties, such the means, which a handful of men—the International Committee—had to reckon with, and which enabled them to perform what has been described—and a great many other things too.

Despite such difficulties, and such pitiful means, some critics maintain that the Committee should have kept pace with events, and wiped out all traces of the war!

"And a great many other things too..."

This is not a report; the General Report will be published later. Our aim today is to give a brief account of the chief activities of the International Committee during hostilities. To make it a complete summary, we should speak of many other activities on a smaller scale, yet presenting arduous problems: repatriation and exchange of seriously wounded and sick; repatriation of civilian populations; shipment of food to the Greek Islands; relief of the French population in the German "pockets" on the French coast; and a hundred undertakings of greater or less duration. Shall we talk about all that?

Instead, suppose we talk about the Committee's failures.

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1 At the close of 1946 nearly 55 million.
"It is indeed extremely distressing not to be always able either to ease the pain of those who are before us, or to reach others whose cries claim our assistance. Again, why go to the right when on the left there are so many dying without a friendly word, without solace, without so much as a glass of water to quench their burning thirst!"

Henry Dunant

(A Memory of Solferino.)

Yes, there were failures—many of them. In its six-year struggle to relieve the sufferings caused by war, the International Committee met with more than one reverse; the preceding pages hint at several, and to these must be added others, too many to count. Those who criticize the Committee, on this score, sometimes in tones of bitterness, must know that Geneva felt such reverses keenly, and with no less bitterness.

For Geneva had indeed tried.

The failure which is the most striking, because it occurred in a sphere which is certainly peculiar to the International Committee, was the matter of the Soviet prisoners of war in the hands of the Axis Powers, and of the Axis nationals detained in the U.S.S.R. Here failure was total. The International Committee could do nothing, or so little that it is scarcely worth mentioning. The prime cause resided in the fact that the Soviet Union was one of the States which had not ratified the 1929 Convention
relative to the treatment of prisoners of war. Thus, as regards Russia the Axis countries were no more bound by this treaty than Russia was with regard to them 1.

We might stop here. No conventions, no intervention. It is true that the U.S.S.R. considered itself bound by the old Hague Regulations of 1907, but these, while already providing for the establishment of national information bureaux and possible action by aid societies, contain no mention of the International Committee.

The latter was not qualified by any treaty stipulation to take steps in behalf of prisoners of war captured on the Eastern front. Neither, it would appear, had it any reason to do so. A Great Power no doubt has motives for declining to ratify a Convention.

The matter might have been left at that; Geneva might have considered that the treatment of prisoners taken on the Eastern front was none of its concern, at least so long as belligerents did not themselves invite it to act.

Geneva does not, however, consider that treaty stipulations are indispensable to give a prisoner of war the right to the care which the Red Cross extends to all war victims. That is why the Committee suggested to all belligerents, as they entered the war, that if they were not bound by the Prisoners of War Convention, for lack of ratification by either party, they should nevertheless observe the treaty in practice; or that at least they should adopt, in the widest sense, the principles which it embodied. For the same reason, too, the Committee was not discouraged by the lack of response which this suggestion at first met with in Moscow.

At the outset of the first campaign in Finland, on November 30, 1939, the Committee, acting in accordance with custom, offered its services to the two Powers at war. Finland stated its readiness to implement the Convention, but there was no similar reaction from the Russian side. On two or three occasions, the Alliance of Red Cross and Red

1 See above, page 43.
Crescent Societies requested the services of the Committee, chiefly in connection with particular enquiries. Despite many attempts it was not found possible, in regard to the problems arising from the war, to establish regular relations between Geneva and the Soviet Government.

That was the position when, on June 22, 1941, the forces of the Axis Powers invaded the territory of the Soviet Union. The following day, June 23, the International Committee again offered its services to both adversaries. For the first time since 1939, the Soviet Government answered the Committee. Quite apart from any recognition of the 1929 Prisoners of War Convention, it expressed willingness to exchange information about prisoners of war, "subject to reciprocity". A little later, it agreed that a delegate of the Committee should contact the Soviet Ambassador in Ankara, with a view to organizing in that town an intermediary office between the Central Agency in Geneva and the Official Information Bureau in Moscow. The Axis Powers in their turn agreed, one after the other, to exchange lists of prisoners with the enemy. Italy was even ready to implement the Prisoners of War Convention.

The exchange of lists and information via Ankara and Geneva did not yet open the door to all the International Committee's usual activities in behalf of prisoners of war. No allusion was yet made to camp visits, issue of relief supplies, or a permanent delegation in Russia, as in other countries. It was only a beginning, but a promising beginning. A first "list" of Russian prisoners of war—two hundred names written in pencil—was received from Germany and forwarded. It was also the last. While other Axis Powers continued, even in the absence of reciprocity, to forward nominal rolls, the German authorities, pleading Russia's delay in sending names and in allowing prisoners to write home, flatly refused to supply any further details until reciprocity was ensured. All the Committee's attempts to secure such reciprocity were of no avail.

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1 This Alliance, which embraces the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies (see note 1, page 79) of the Soviet Socialist Republics, is recognized as the Russian National Red Cross Society, and as such forms part of the International Red Cross.
In the meantime, reports about the destitute condition of Soviet prisoners of war in Germany gave reason to fear that many of them would not survive the coming winter. To start with, the Committee took steps in the hope of organizing a relief scheme. It negotiated both with the German authorities and with the Allies, and directly or indirectly with the Soviet authorities, who were most closely concerned. The talks dragged on for months. Briefly, the situation was as follows: the German military authorities agreed in principle to the sending of relief supplies for Soviet prisoners of war, but would not allow the International Committee to supervise or participate in any way in the actual work of distribution. The Soviets did not indicate their intention to send relief to their nationals, and were probably at that time not in a position to do so. The British Government was willing to furnish supplies on behalf of its ally, and the Canadian Red Cross offered quantities of vitamins. But the blockade regulations demanded that the International Committee should itself supervise issues. One thing only could possibly make the German authorities agree to this concession, namely, that the Soviet Government should grant reciprocity by approving the appointment of a delegate of the Committee in the U.S.S.R., and by authorizing the despatch of relief supplies to Axis prisoners of war in Russia.

The Committee's letters remained unanswered; its steps proved unavailing. The condition of the Soviet prisoners of war grew steadily worse, without the Red Cross being permitted to do anything towards improving it.

A further attempt was made in May 1942, when certain States allied or associated with the U.S.S.R. expressed a desire to send relief to the Soviet prisoners. Success depended on the German authorities. The German High Command dragged matters out. Before officially refusing, in September, to allow any parcels to be sent, it seemed inclined to accept a relief scheme, but without supervision of issues or visits to the camps by the Committee's delegates. Issues would be conducted by the camp commandants, and only in certain camps indicated by the High Command. Such terms were unacceptable both to the blockade authorities and to the donors of the supplies.
Relief supplies in kind which were already available, were then sent to the Finnish Government, who were asking for foodstuffs for the Soviet prisoners in their hands. Since supervision by the Committee was allowed, it was even possible to make further consignments, from stocks provided by the Red Cross Societies of Allied or neutral countries.

It is unnecessary, in this brief survey, to give a detailed account of the attempts made by the Committee to negotiate with the Soviet authorities, or with the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, both as regards the work of the Central Agency and relief work. Letters sent direct to Moscow usually remained unanswered; indirect negotiations through various Soviet diplomatic representatives led merely to a constant alternation of hope and disappointment, but to no tangible results, since these representatives could not themselves make any decisions. Nor need we enumerate occasional slight contacts—a few applications for information about individual cases here, a parcel of mail there—nor the opportunities for action granted to the Committee by allies of Germany. One fact remains predominant: millions of prisoners, on either side of the fighting zone, were totally deprived of services which the International Committee was ready and anxious to give.

The cause of this deadlock? The two chief antagonists of the Eastern war front could alone furnish an explanation, each as regards its own part in the matter. As for the International Committee, it could but record that its endeavours met in this case with less response than elsewhere. Each of the two opponents left it to the other to take the generous step which would have perhaps made it possible, on grounds of reciprocity, to undertake relief work on a fairly large scale. It is true that the Soviets were embittered by the treatment accorded, at the very outset, to the Russian prisoners of war in Germany, and by the conduct of the war in the Ukraine. That scarcely predisposed them to make any spontaneous gesture.

Why then this persistent reserve, on the Soviet side, with regard to the International Committee's offers of assistance? Perhaps it was not understood why the Committee was unable
to enforce acceptance of its services in behalf of Russian prisoners of war in Germany. But how could the Soviet Government expect that the Committee could secure from the enemy what they themselves were refusing, namely, the de facto implementing of a Convention they themselves had not ratified?

Whatever the underlying cause, this obvious reserve is not a sufficient explanation of the failure of the Red Cross with regard to the Soviets. As a matter of fact, Geneva was not the only possible intermediary. The failure to implement the 1929 Convention, which alone expressly allowed the Committee to act, reduced the latter, in relation to the Eastern belligerents, to a mere third party offering voluntary services. Other bodies—Protecting Powers, Governments or Red Cross Societies of neutral countries—were as well placed as the Committee—perhaps better—for intervention. Their attempts, be it noted, met with no greater success.

But even this circumstance cannot prevent the Committee from feeling keenly, as a serious failure on its part, the apparent indifference which rendered its efforts abortive.

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We must refer again, in this chapter, to the concentration camps.

We have described the impenetrable curtain which the International Committee came up against, the latter's persistent attempts to discover a rent in the curtain, its slow penetration, and its meagre results, achieved painfully one by one. A report on the subject has appeared.

That is perhaps not enough. Whatever may be said or done, in the opinion of many, the mystery—nay, the scandal—remains complete. The critics fail to understand, or refuse to admit, how it was that the Red Cross was powerless to prevent the

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1 See above, pages 70 sqq.
existence of concentration camps, and that the International Committee, the so-called "conscience of mankind", was unable to put an end to them. "There must have been some way of putting a stop to all that", they think. "How is it that this Committee, whose work in other fields is recorded by such imposing figures, did not do more? Doubtless, they didn't know how to set about it, or didn't dare, or else—can it be that they didn't want to? And in any case, why didn't they tell the world what was going on in the camps?"

Tell the world? By what means? Extracts from the press which were available to all? Geneva knew neither more nor less than anybody else: rumours, stories, conjectures based on tales told by the few victims who escaped from these hells on earth, in so far as the lips of the survivors were not sealed by terror.

The International Committee wanted and dared. But that it did not know how to set about it is obvious, since the world is now conscious that the only way to put an end to the horror of the camps was to make war, and to win it.

To reproach the Red Cross for not being able to secure the result which it took the most powerful nations in the world six years to achieve, at the cost of millions of killed and wounded and the ruin of a continent, is to pay it the most handsome compliment. For no-one would expect that, in this particular case, the Red Cross should do more than was possible, had it not elsewhere accomplished the impossible.

But the Red Cross remains indifferent to compliments in respect of events which recall so much blood and tears.

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Starting from the fairly wide-spread idea that the International Committee is the guardian, if not the guarantor, of the Conventions, but without always knowing what the Conventions really are, often believing that they include the whole body of international law, people may obviously think that the Committee has failed in its task.
But the International Committee is nothing of the sort. No international treaty confers upon it any such duties, which it has no means whatever of fulfilling. The courts, who are the guardians of law and contracts, can pass judgments and sentences and order the police to carry them out. The International Committee has neither armed forces, nor sanctions. As for instituting enquiries, it reminded belligerents at the outbreak of the war, that it could only do so if invited by both the parties concerned—who, of course, never agreed on the subject.

Why then criticize the International Committee for its failure? Simply because it did dare!

Had the Committee kept strictly to the mandates and authorizations embodied in the Conventions, it would have set up the Central Agency, in behalf of prisoners of war only; it would have tried to forward parcels from home to prisoners of war only; and it would have visited prisoner of war camps only, giving the inmates the comfort of a friendly presence and leaving to the Protecting Powers only to take any steps to enforce respect for the stipulations of the Convention. The Committee would then say: “Here are my statistics: so many million index-cards, so many million messages, so many million parcels transported and issued, so many million miles covered in visiting the camps.”

But it attempted to do more. In the eyes of the world, he who dares to act, instead of being a mere onlooker, must succeed. “You have saved this man? Then it was because you were able to do so. So why didn’t you save a second, and a third, and all the others? Is it because you didn’t want to? Or because you were partial? Or did you lack the ability? In that case, of course, your services are useless.”

Partial! How many wounded men, on the morrow of the battle of Solferino, died before any of the emergency helpers could reach them—died thinking: “Why? Why are they attending to that man and not to me? It’s not fair. They aren’t fair.” Such is the tragic position of the Red Cross, when it outsteps the limits marked out in the Conventions. It is placed in a cruel dilemma: either do nothing, or try to save some, and in so doing create that
sense of injustice, that additional torture for those whom it cannot save.

Was the International Committee wrong to dare? For its so-called "prestige" and its peace of mind, perhaps. Nevertheless, if need be, it would dare again.

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We shall now turn briefly to what the Committee was able to do in the Far East.

The story could have been told in the sections dealing with the Central Agency or with the Relief Department. The subject deserves however special mention, because everything was "special" in this field, and because the Committee was unable to do what it desired, or to accomplish all that its achievements in other theatres of war led it to expect.

The causes of what is often considered a semi-failure were many. First of all, the nature of the war: it was an "ocean war", entirely different from hostilities on the mainland. Then, the Committee's fields of operation were widely scattered, and communication between them and with Geneva was almost impossible. There were the difficulties of transport by sea and land. Lastly, it is obvious that even if Japan had strictly implemented the 1929 Convention, the prisoners of war and civilian internees in its hands would have been more badly off than in Europe or America. Thus, the rations which are adequate for a Japanese soldier, spell starvation and sickness for a white man. As for general living conditions and forms of discipline to which Japanese soldiers are accustomed, the mere contrast which they afford with those of Western countries signifies for a white prisoner of war indignity and humiliation.

Now Japan had not ratified the 1929 Convention relative to the treatment of prisoners of war. In reply to the Committee's suggestion it had declared its willingness to observe the Convention in practice, but with reservations, and "mutatis mutandis". Mutatis mutandis means adaptation to circumstances, and is a fearfully elastic term!
To all these causes, which were in themselves sufficient to explain many difficulties, must be added another, which dominates the situation and makes it far worse: the Japanese conception of a prisoner of war.

The departure of a Japanese combatant for war is usually the occasion for a family ceremony—and be it noted, a funeral ceremony. From that moment, the warrior is indeed dead to his family, and must come home either as a conqueror or as a handful of ashes. If he becomes a prisoner of war, he not only disgraces himself, but also brings disgrace upon his relatives. He is practically a dead man.

That is why, until the final capitulation, ordered by the Emperor and thus not shameful like mass surrender or individual capture, there were very few Japanese prisoners of war. The Japanese prisoner did not ask for any sort of attention; indeed, he could not understand why he should be treated humanely, nor why the Red Cross should take any interest in his fate. Very often he refused to make use of mail facilities, and even declined to give his name, preferring to leave his relatives in the hope of his death, rather than inflict upon them the shame of his captivity. Even in the official bureaux at Tokyo, nominal rolls of Japanese prisoners and prisoner mail were left untouched. We must not judge this conduct too severely; the information bureaux would have acted more cruelly, had they sent next of kin news that would have brought them far more sorrow than relief.

Each country has a right to its customs and ideas, and thinks them by far the best. It is not our business to pass judgment in such matters, but simply to state facts which may help to focus our outlook properly.

The logical outcome of such views was that, having little interest in their own prisoners of war, the Japanese authorities could feel none for enemy prisoners. This accounts for the unsatisfactory treatment, not to say the ill-treatment, of prisoners in Japanese hands. It also accounts for the passive resistance offered to all applications made by the Committee or its delegates, and the obstacles put in their way. These
applications interfered with the routine working of the military machine, and thus seemed suspect to authorities who failed to realize that they were wholly disinterested.

On the outbreak of hostilities in the Pacific the Committee asked for Japanese consent to the appointment of delegates, first in Japan, and then in the territories occupied by Japanese forces. In order not to lose precious time in obtaining permits and visas, and in travelling, Geneva had to nominate Swiss citizens resident in Japan, and willing to undertake duties which promised from the outset to be delicate, dangerous perhaps, and always thankless. Tokyo gave its consent for Japan proper, Shanghai and Hong Kong, but refused to recognize the delegates appointed by Geneva in the Philippines, the Malay Peninsula and the Dutch East Indies. These men could act only in their private capacity. Similarly, the delegates appointed in Thailand (Siam), and later in Indo-China, were forbidden access to prisoner of war camps in Japanese hands, and could do welfare work in a private capacity only. Lastly, the Japanese authorities consistently refused to allow a special mission to be sent to Tokyo, to discuss all the problems on the spot, and at last to bring the isolated delegates detailed instructions from Geneva. It was only during the final months of the war, after the chief delegate in Tokyo had died heart-broken and overworked, and when the war had reached its turning-point, that the Japanese Government agreed to accept a new head of the Tokyo delegation and an assistant from Geneva. Eighteen months were spent in negotiations, in applications for the necessary visas and travel permits, and in actual travelling via North Africa, Turkey, Iran, Soviet Russia and Manchuria, before the representatives could reach their post, just before the U.S.S.R. declared war on Japan.

All this must be borne in mind, if one wishes to appreciate what the Red Cross was able to do, and to understand what it was unable to do, internationally, in the Far East. All this; and in addition, the death of the Committee's delegate in Borneo; he and his wife were shot, because their persistent attempts to help Allied prisoners of war led to their being accused of espionage.
In Geneva, the Agency received 150,000 names of prisoners of war and civilian internees in the hands of the Japanese. There must have been fully twice that number, counting all those who died in the camps or yards, and whose names were never given. As for mail, there was hardly any: some letters took two years to reach the prisoners. The Committee never relaxed its efforts, and at last, in January 1945, the Japanese authorities agreed that the prisoners should be allowed to receive and to send telegraphic messages at the rate of a single message of ten words each *per annum*! Even this slight privilege must have been conceded sparingly, since 64,000 telegrams were sent from Geneva to the camps, and only 2,000 replies came back for next of kin.

Relief supplies, at any rate, must be sent at once—as speedily as possible! The delegates warned Geneva that it would require much time and patience. Those among them who were officially recognized, visited the camps—but what infinite trouble they had to get there! For certain remote camps it was a regular expedition. They visited the camps, but not all of them; after the surrender they learned the existence, in Japan alone, of sixty places of internment of which they had never been told. Moreover, the authorities always refused to indicate the strength of the camps, and to grant delegates the right to talk with the inmates without witnesses. This right, it must be remembered, is not given to the Committee's representatives by the Convention, but is a general custom. In Japan, the military authorities only knew army regulations, and these are not exactly favourable to prisoners of war.

Hampered in their movements, watched and suspected, their observations and demands often provoking incidents which involved further delays, the delegates had no easy task in assessing the kind and quantity of relief supplies required. Their mail was delayed, censored, altered or refused, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that they succeeded in sending information to Geneva.

When the dispatch of relief supplies was accepted in principle, other obstacles arose. No foreign ship, even flying the Red Cross
flag, was allowed to take supplies into any Japanese port. A few Japanese vessels, chartered for the exchange of civilian internees, were alone available, and this meant unloading and reloading in Africa and India. Furthermore, the Japanese authorities claimed the right to conduct the distributions themselves. In a few cases the Committee's delegates were warned in time and able to be present, but usually the distribution was done without their supervision.

Despite all these obstacles, seven thousand tons of relief supplies were shipped in this way.

Seven million kilograms. But that was not all. To supplement these donations in kind, Governments, National Red Cross Societies and other organizations placed funds at the Committee's disposal, enabling it to make purchases locally, in occupied countries where goods were still to be found. The delegates, especially those who were not recognized and who acted in a private capacity, worked wonders to obtain supplies and forward them by every kind of means to the camps within their reach. One of the main difficulties lay in the transfer of the funds received in Geneva. These could only be converted, first into Japanese yen and then into the currency of the various occupied countries, through Tokyo, and at the official rate of exchange. These operations were slow and complicated, during which currencies depreciated and prices rose. More than once, the Committee's representatives or the Swiss business concerns whose agents they were in the Far East, made advances out of their own funds, in order to reduce these losses.

Seven million kilograms sent and nineteen million Swiss francs transferred for local purchases for prisoners and internees in Japanese hands represent only one tenth of what was despatched to their compatriots in the hands of the Axis Powers in Europe. That gives one a picture of the privations endured by these men, and of the inestimable value of these supplies to the Far East prisoners whom it was possible to contact.

After the surrender, and during the sometimes fairly long interval before the arrival of the Allied Forces, the Committee's representatives were at last granted ampler facilities by the
Japanese authorities. They obtained an increase in daily rations for the men, and were able to develop their relief schemes. It was not too late, but quite the reverse, general disorganization making this intermediate period most trying for the prisoners as a whole.

The Committee’s delegates have sometimes been criticized for not having done more, and for their failure to force themselves upon the Japanese authorities. Such criticism betrays ignorance of the circumstances in which these representatives were placed. Other critics, aware of their difficulties, say they should have resigned. Such public withdrawal, it is maintained, would have impressed the Japanese and led them to alter their line of policy. This argument is entirely wrong. The delegates considered this course; more than once, one or another felt inclined to abandon a position in which he had nothing to gain but difficulties, risk and criticism. They had, however, good reason to fear that such action would make no difference whatever in the attitude of the Japanese Government, and that no substitute for any retiring delegate would be accepted. Having to choose between amour-propre and peace of mind on the one hand, and relief work, however inadequate, on the other, they did not hesitate one moment.

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The prisoners of the East European theatre, the concentration camps and the Far East: did the Red Cross fail in regard to all these?

It was far more, and much worse than that. The civilized world itself had failed.
On May 8, 1945, the sirens sounded for the last time in Europe. Three months later, the Japanese armies laid down their arms. The war was over.

It was over, but its effects remained. The wounds were still open, and would remain open for a long time. There were no more bombs, but there was no bread yet. The peoples breathed again, because no one would hurt them any more; but they still suffered. And then, the bells of peace did not ring in the same way for everybody. For some, it was the hour of deliverance, for others the hour of captivity. For the Red Cross, they did not ring in the hour of rest.

At the Central Agency in Geneva, the German surrender brought in more millions of index-cards: all the forces of a Great Power had been made prisoner at one fell swoop! The German Section became ten times as large. But index-cards are not the only thing: avalanches of applications for news poured in. There was no longer any Government in Germany, no official information bureaux, no postal services, no National Red Cross; indeed, there was no Germany at all.

As there was no mail service, there could be no correspondence between prisoners of war and next of kin, as was guaranteed by the Convention. Many relatives of prisoners were wandering aimlessly, looking for shelter, a mere roof. Means had to be found of renewing the family tie; this was the Committee's "Red Cross Message", which the Allied authorities agreed to issue in the British, American and French zones. A million
such messages passed through the Agency; they were checked with the card-index, and the majority could be handed to the addressees in some prisoner camp.

The wireless, now freed from wartime restrictions, was made available to the Committee. To gain time, and to give the families scattered all over Europe a chance of reuniting, tens of thousands of names and addresses of prisoners of war, former deportees, and waifs and strays were read out over the microphone. The “factory” at the Agency was thus still running.

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While some prisoner camps were being emptied, others were filling. Sometimes, the same camps saw the custodians of yesterday take the place of their former captives. The Committee’s delegates resumed their visits, enquiries, representations and reports.

But an unforeseen difficulty arose. Sometimes, the delegates were forbidden to enter the camps. Elsewhere they found that while maintenance of the prisoners was satisfactory, certain essential privileges of the Convention were denied them. They were told that the men were not prisoners of war, but “disarmed forces”; therefore the Convention did not apply to them.

In actual fact, armed forces of the Axis Powers which had fallen into Allied hands after, and by virtue of the unconditional surrender were placed by the Allies in a fresh category, called “Surrendered Enemy Personnel”.

No objection can be raised against a Detaining Power giving, for practical reasons, a special label to prisoners of war captured in particular circumstances. As regards the Japanese, it may even be thought that the name given to the forces who laid down their arms at their Emperor’s command was, from the humanitarian point of view, a good thing; it spared these captives and their relatives the humiliation which for them attaches to the term “prisoner of war”.

Instead of placing surrendered enemy forces in camps, a victorious Power may well be satisfied with disarming them and
ensuring that they cannot reorganise for any further attack. To deny unilaterally the application of a Convention to men who have a right to its protection, is quite a different matter.

The circumstances in which a combatant falls into enemy hands have doubtless their importance, as touching the honour or dishonour of the man himself and of the forces to which he belongs; from the point of view of the 1929 Convention, they are of no significance. Whether the combatant is taken by force, whether he surrenders alone or as a member of a unit, or whether he capitulates at the bidding of his Supreme Command, the situation is identical, the moment he is in enemy hands. The German and Japanese members of forces, detained usually in the country where they happened to be at the time of surrender, were not only disarmed; they were in the hands, and at the mercy of the victorious Powers.

The International Committee did not feel it could simply accept this situation, nor can it remain content with its generally acknowledged right to perform its customary services in behalf of these men. In the Committee’s opinion, the principles embodied in the 1929 Convention are indivisible. Arrangements made between belligerents may regulate certain matters concerning the treatment of prisoners of war, but they may not put an end, wholly or in part, to the implementing of the Convention, nor replace the latter by less favourable regulations. Still less may a Power do this by unilateral decision. Such cases occurred during the war, as we have seen. The Committee did not always secure acceptance for its point of view, far from it; but that is no reason why it should give up defending its standpoint today.

It is not a matter of quibbling about points of detail. On the whole, indeed, it may be said that “Surrendered Enemy Personnel” are properly treated. Very often, the men themselves have no complaints to make. This is, of course, most satisfactory, but were their treatment even much better, the question would remain the same. Far more is involved than the régime applied in practice, and in particular cases. What is implicated is the very existence of the Convention, neither more nor less.

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1 See above, pp. 47 sqq.
The introduction into the Hague Regulations of provisions relative to the treatment of prisoners of war—provisions taken up and developed in the 1929 Convention—was a notable victory for the principles of humanity. This victory lay less in the wording of the Articles concerning prisoners, than in their mere existence. Henceforward, a prisoner of war is not left to the discretion of the enemy; he has a definite status, which can serve against the Detaining Power, as also against himself.

After the Polish prisoners of war, the Italian military internees and others whom we have mentioned, millions of combatants, captured at the time of the armistice, have in their turn been denied the application of the Conventions, and left at the mercy of the conquerors. If this state of things should become the general rule, what would happen to the Conventions? It would be useless to reinforce their stipulations, as is now suggested, or to adopt new agreements in behalf of civilians, as is further proposed, if a belligerent might henceforth, by simply interchanging labels and inventing fresh names, avoid the observance not only of the letter, but also perhaps of the spirit of these treaties. And with what authority could the International Committee then demand respect for the Conventions, if it had tacitly allowed such precedents to be established? The authors of the Conventions and those who amend them today would be fully justified in censuring the Committee to-morrow for not having defended, even against them, the principles which they embodied in solemn covenants.

We can therefore look upon as most fortunate, the reply which the United States Government gave to the Committee on March 17, 1947, to the effect that the said Government consider, for their part, that “Surrendered Enemy Personnel” must be regarded as prisoners of war, entitled to the treatment laid down in the 1929 Convention.

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“There were no more bombs, but there was no bread yet.” Relief was required.

Those Allied prisoners of war whom the German surrender
and the opening of the camps cast upon the roads, without food supplies, in a devastated country, were fairly soon taken over by their own forces and sent home. What about the civilians, the millions of "displaced persons" whom the war had kept in the Axis countries, or brought there? The deportees were free, but it would take months, perhaps longer still, to repatriate them all. The feeding of these people on the spot offered a problem which neither the occupying Powers nor the great international institutions could solve in a few days. But it does not take many days to starve. Therefore, for several months, the Committee's white motor trucks continued their trips, conveying supplies to the people streaming along the roads, to the camps where they were assembled. Thus was issued the remainder of the stocks of food parcels which were piled up at Geneva at the time of the surrender, the Governments concerned allowing them to be used without distinction of nationality. Eight hundred thousand kilograms of food and seventy thousand kilograms of medical supplies were thus conveyed; to these must be added the quantities of food and clothing purchased with funds provided by Governments, Red Cross Societies and private persons.

Further, we have the prisoners of war and civilian internees of the defeated countries. During the war, they had not been a heavy charge on the Committee's Relief Division. Comparatively few in number, until the great offensives, they were detained for the most part in countries which gave them adequate maintenance. Suddenly, the close of hostilities reversed the situation. There were millions of prisoners belonging to the Axis countries—more than all the Allied prisoners of war there had ever been. Most of them, especially in Europe, were, or are still detained either in war-devastated countries, where even the civilian population is short of everything, or in their own ruined home countries. For them, there is no National Red Cross Society, not even a Government to send them food parcels. Their relatives can supply nothing at all. The International Committee, which had no more relief funds and received but little for those men, turned to those German prisoners of
war who were better off, since they had managed to save part of their pay or their workers' wages. Some of these men even asked that part of their contribution should benefit the civilian populations of Europe and the victims of concentration camps. Thus the International Committee was enabled to purchase foodstuffs, clothing and medical supplies for over two million dollars, plus twenty million French francs.

At one point, emergency measures had to be taken. Within a short time, 750,000 prisoners of war had been transferred to France, to territory still suffering from war and occupation, where the food supply was a daily problem. It was suddenly discovered that the food and health situation in many camps was on the verge of becoming disastrous, and that local resources were insufficient to avert this calamity. On learning of this state of things, the American military authorities placed their stocks at the Committee's disposal. The French authorities having issued the necessary permits, a team of the Committee's delegates and escorts was quickly recruited and appeared on the scene to take first aid to the men, and to help with the repatriation of those unfit for work. Many were thus saved, but the situation still remains serious, and the International Committee must continue its relief work, here as elsewhere.

By degrees, prisoners of war are being discharged or repatriated. Many still remain, however, for the most part employed as workmen. As long as any are still detained, the International Committee, with the permission and even with the help of the Governments concerned, will pursue the task it undertook with the consent of all, in the first days of the war.

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That is not all, however. How long will these prisoners of war be further detained? The 1929 Convention specifies particularly, in Article 75, that "when belligerents conclude an armistice convention, they shall normally cause to be included therein provisions concerning the repatriation of prisoners of war. If it has not been found possible to insert in that Convention
such stipulations, the belligerents shall, nevertheless, enter into communication with each other on the question as soon as possible. In any case, the repatriation of prisoners shall be effected, as soon as possible after the conclusion of peace”.

Now in the case of Germany and Japan, there were no armistice conventions. The first of these Powers even ceased to exist, de facto and de jure, as an organized State, so that it could not even conclude with the victors any suitable agreement, to make up for the fact that the armistice conventions were dumb as regards the repatriation of prisoners. No peace treaty is yet in sight. It is even conceivable, in theory, that peace may be restored without the conclusion of any bilateral treaties. Does that signify that prisoners of war might in such a case be held indefinitely, during the pleasure of the Detaining Power?

Obviously, the authors of the Convention never foresaw a situation of this kind. Indeed, the literal observance of the Convention could, in this respect, lead to the negation of the principle on which this treaty is founded. For Article 75 means nothing if not this: the right to hold an enemy as prisoner—like the right to kill or wound him—is a transitory right. It must expire as soon as possible after the cessation of the state of war, which alone justifies the various means allowed by international law to render the enemy powerless.

The International Committee could not remain indifferent to a situation which, if prolonged, would create a dangerous precedent. It has drawn the attention of Governments concerned to the matter, asking them to make known their intentions and what steps they intend to take, so as to act in obedience to the principles of the Geneva Convention ¹.

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Another problem of the immediate post-war period was the transfer to Germany of the populations of German origin, living

chiefly in Poland and Czechoslovakia. This scheme was decided upon by the Allied Powers shortly after the cessation of hostilities and started immediately.

Governments alone are competent to decide upon and carry out measures of this kind. Yet, if one remembers that the transfer to Greece of the 1,500,000 Greek residents in Asia Minor, after the first World War, took several years and involved extensive relief work, we can easily imagine the host of humanitarian problems arising from the hurried evacuation, into a devastated and famished Europe, of these twelve million Germans.

As a matter of fact, the International Committee received numerous appeals for help. It urged the Allied Governments to ensure that this transfer of populations should be carried out as humanely as possible.

Generally speaking, before being sent to Germany, the members of racial minorities were, as a first step, hastily assembled in camps where living conditions were usually poor. Since internment was decided on grounds of nationality only, the International Committee considered that these populations should be put on the same footing as Civilian Internees. Thus, in Czechoslovakia the Committee's delegates were finally allowed to visit these camps. They secured a certain number of improvements in living conditions, and relief supplies were sent. However, the scale of the transfers, the speed with which they were carried out, the lack of available resources, the number and urgency of the other tasks which the Committee had to face, and lastly, a certain degree of local slackness, due to the animosity felt towards the racial minorities by peoples too long oppressed and persecuted—all these circumstances prevented the Committee from making that full contribution towards the solution of the problem, which an often disastrous situation would have demanded.

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Lastly, there was the question of relief for the civilian populations. The "cease fire" did not rebuild ruins in a moment, nor put an end to starvation overnight. None could tell how
long it would be before a regular and adequate food supply was ensured. Governments turned their earnest attention to this problem; so did UNRRA too, but this latter undertaking, despite its vastness, did not include everybody. Others, too, were concerned, including Red Cross Societies and other welfare associations of Allied or neutral countries. Several of them, who were not in a position to take direct steps, preferred to work through the Joint Relief Commission. Furthermore, the military authorities recognized the International Committee as sole intermediary for certain kinds of relief. Thus the cooperation begun during the war continued: the Joint Relief Commission purchased, transported and despatched; the delegates of the International Committee supervised the issue of supplies. They also conducted negotiations, which opened fresh fields for the Joint Commission (in addition to those in which it continued to work in the liberated countries), among the populations of Eastern Europe formerly associated with Germany, for example, and in the occupation zones of Germany. The Soviet occupation authorities, for their part, consented to these undertakings; in the Russian zone the International Committee is still the only neutral intermediary between donors and distribution agencies.

Thus the Joint Relief Commission was able to despatch to the populations of the various countries further millions of kilograms of supplies—more even than throughout the whole duration of the war.

This participation of the International Committee in relief for civilian populations cannot be pursued indefinitely. The Committee is a neutral intermediary in time of war; it was only as such that it took action, since it has no resources of its own to hand out. Once the war is over, the neutral intermediary may still be useful sometimes, but is no longer always indispensable. The feeding of the civilian populations is a matter for Governments. They are at liberty to act and possess the means. What was sent during the war through the loop-hole at Geneva

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1 Joint Relief Commission of the International Red Cross. See above, page 80 (Chapter VI).
was a great deal, because there was no other way in. It is nothing today, compared with what should be done directly.

And then, funds are once more exhausted.

It is natural therefore that the Committee should gradually withdraw from this field and confine itself to the tasks which it can on no account abandon yet: the Agency and the prisoners of war. It is natural that it should have acceded to the desire expressed by the League of Red Cross Societies, that the activity of the Joint Relief Commission, a conjoint organization, should come to an end. Let others, who are better equipped, carry on the work. But it is natural also that, in view of the extent of the disaster, the International Committee should remain at the disposal of those who still require its help, even if this help is confined to opening doors, pointing the way, giving information about requirements, negotiating agreements in behalf of other institutions, or enabling them to benefit by agreements which it obtained for itself. The Committee will do all this to the limit of its means—of the means, that is, with which it is provided.

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The International Committee is an organ of the Red Cross and draws no distinction between nationalities. It acts in behalf of those who need its help, where it can reach them, and as circumstances permit. Throughout the war, conditions decided that its work should benefit almost exclusively nationals of the Allied countries, whether as prisoners of war, internees, deportees or civilian populations. This work was financed by the grants of Governments and Red Cross Societies of belligerents and neutral countries. Never did the International Committee regulate its customary undertakings according to the amount or the sources of these contributions.

Now, the following must be stressed: since the end of hostilities, events have obliged the Committee to act chiefly in behalf of the nationals of the defeated countries. And there is another fact: the Committee's funds are exhausted. Since January 1, 1946, it has only paid its way thanks to loans granted by the Swiss Government.
Will the International Committee now have to abandon its traditional task, for lack of funds?

This is a test for the whole Red Cross. Should victors and neutrals, as well as vanquished, fail to supply it with the means to fulfil its present task, it would signify the repudiation of all that the Committee, with so much labour and in the face of so many obstacles, but sustained by the hopes of so many millions of human beings, managed to accomplish in the course of the war.

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Lastly, the International Committee has its permanent mandate: to uphold the spirit of the Red Cross in the international field. It has its peace-time mandates: the work which the International Red Cross Conference has instructed it to undertake, with a view to amending the international Conventions, whose purpose it is to alleviate the sufferings caused by war.

It is the fate of the Red Cross always to lag behind the development of methods of warfare—to learn lessons from the most recent war which may be useful in any future conflict, only to find, when war again breaks out, that the gap between the sufferings inflicted and the means of relieving them is wider every time.

That is no sufficient reason for despair.

Scarcely had hostilities ended than the Committee began studying the Conventions. This work is part of its duties and traditions. But it is not a monopoly, and nobody in the Red Cross world can remain indifferent to this study, since the Conventions are at once the manifestation, on the legal plane, of the Red Cross spirit, and one of the instruments of humanitarian work in time of war. Thanks to its position as a neutral intermediary, working simultaneously in both camps, the International Committee has been able to gain considerable experience. But there is other experience too—that of National Societies and other welfare associations, that of belligerent Governments, of Protecting Powers, and, lastly, all the experience of the war victims themselves.
Therefore, while settling down to its task, and drawing lessons from its own observations, the Committee, without waiting for the next International Red Cross Conference, suggested to National Societies that they should study together, at a preliminary Conference which met in Geneva in the summer of 1946, the revision and extension of the Conventions, and the problem of the general activities of the Red Cross in war-time.

Critics will say: "Those who provide for war, already prepare for it; all efforts should be directed to one single aim—peace."

The Red Cross is not preparing for war. On the contrary, it would greet as its happiest day that on which further recourse to its war-time activities could be abandoned. Precisely for this reason it must be prepared, whatever the situation tomorrow, to save as many lives as possible: prepared to affirm by action, in the thick of the fight if need be, and in spite of the deadliest attacks inspired by hatred, the unity of nations and the love of man for his fellows, without which it would be vain to hope that "the bells of peace will ever ring out for the entire world."
Why have we told this story of results achieved, difficulties encountered, failures suffered?

We have not written about results in order to gain credit thereby. Wounds that have been tended, distress that has been relieved are not matter for self-advertisement.

We have not written about difficulties in order to stress the value of results, to enhance the merit of those who achieved them, nor even to find excuses for not having done better.

We have not written about failures in order to justify them. An administrative body which has definite powers for the performance of a definite task must, if it can, explain its inefficacy. The International Committee is not in that position.

The reason why we have told this story is the lesson it teaches, and this can only be learnt if one faces the facts—liabilities and assets, obstacles as well as possibilities.

One must see war as it is, and not take the Red Cross for what it is not.

On a certain day between 1939 and 1946, in an occupied, war-devastated country, an officer of the occupying army met one of the Committee's delegates and gave vent to his feelings: "Ruins, more ruins, ruins everywhere! I can't stand this any longer. I can't bear seeing all these people dying of hunger and cold. And all those homeless children... I'm done..." Then suddenly he broke out, "But what are you doing about it, you, the Red Cross?"
The delegate replied: "Not much, I agree. We are only a handful in the whole country. Perhaps if there were several hundred thousand of us, having civil and military authority backed by the resources of a great Power, we might be able to do about as much as you!" He refrained, however, from asking whether the officer thought the Red Cross was responsible for all the ruins.

War being what it is, and the International Committee being what it is, results, difficulties and failures serve to show what could be done with more extensive means, and if the Conventions were improved, extended, and more strictly observed. We thus come back, in short, to the "Would it not be possible — ? Is it not desirable — ?" of the beginning. Nothing could be better, on the morrow of the bloodiest war of all time, than to ask again the questions born on the morrow of what was only the bloodiest battle of an epoch,—the questions to which the answer was: the Red Cross.

We cannot here go into details; indeed, it is not for the International Committee alone to deal with the problem, since the latter concerns the Red Cross as a whole, and also to a large extent, the Governments with whom it rests, in the last resort, to give life to the Conventions. Moreover, the amount and variety of experience gained in seven years in all parts of the world demand careful consideration. The Committee, for its part, has settled down to this task, as its mandates and traditions require. The Preliminary Red Cross Conference, which met at Geneva in 1946 to consider the suggestions submitted by the Committee and the proposals which National Societies had been invited to make, indicated the lines along which these studies should be pursued. This is not the place to comment upon the resolutions adopted by the Preliminary Conference 1, nor the recommendations of the Conference of Government Experts

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which sat in April 1947, nor to prejudge the decisions of the International Red Cross Conference of 1948. Let it suffice to stress the general desire to reinforce the Geneva Conventions and to strengthen the means for international action by the Red Cross in time of war, and to add a few general remarks.

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"Is it not desirable" that existing Conventions should be amended, and that the "principle embodied in a treaty and regarded as sacred", which, since 1864, has saved so many wounded and sick combatants, and so many prisoners, should be extended also to other war victims?

Most certainly, yes. The two Geneva Conventions have shown themselves effective in practice. Wherever they have been in force, and implemented, even partially, the condition of those they aim to protect has been far better than where Governments were not thus bound. The Conventions will therefore remain valuable, in so far as belligerents can no longer, by creating fresh categories, prevent those who are entitled to treaty protection from enjoying this privilege.

The endeavours have been told which, since 1934, were made to shield civilians from the sufferings they endured throughout the first World War. The late War justified these attempts. The fullest proof has been furnished that civilians are "in the war", just as much as the armed forces. "Fighting lines" no longer exist. A man may be killed or wounded at any time and in any place, whether he is wearing a uniform or not. As a defender, the combatant no longer protects his next of kin; his anxiety for them is a great as their anxiety for him. As an assailant, he attacks not only the enemy, but also the enemy's women and children.

Consequently, if we still accept the fundamental principle of the Red Cross, there is no reason to withhold any longer from

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wounded, sick or interned civilians, or from all—women, children, the aged—who are unable to take even an indirect part in the war, the same protection that the Conventions grant to combatants, even in the midst of battle or behind a barbed wire fence, the moment their bodily state or their captivity renders them harmless.

The outward form of the Conventions matters little; their content alone is of importance, and too much care cannot be devoted to their drafting.

The first Geneva Convention of 1864, concerning the wounded and sick, was extremely short. Its seven chief Articles embody general principles, and left it to the commanders in chief to work out the details of their application. The experience made in the course of several wars led to its revision, and it was completed, in 1906 and 1929, by more detailed provisions. Similarly, the brief Chapter II of the Hague Regulations relative to prisoners of war became an entire legal code. Today, further revision is required, gaps must be filled, impracticable or ambiguous clauses amended, others adapted to the conditions of modern warfare, yet other stipulations must be more clearly defined.

It is essential that general principles should be clarified; they must be set forth fully and in plain language, leaving no room for misinterpretation and misunderstanding by the subordinate officials responsible for the practical application of numerous paragraphs.

It is further essential to define the field and manner of such application, and to include certain detailed rules. This cannot, however, reach beyond a certain point, for in the matter of treaties, overmuch detail can be a source of weakness, since it limits the application of principles, and does not lend them additional strength.

The Conventions can be revised in the light of past experience only. In a future war, new requirements may proceed from new circumstances; unforeseen events may prevent the actual implementing of some particular clause. Attempts at regulating every item involve a twofold risk: a belligerent may plead either circumstances beyond his control, or the absence of any
provision in a particular case, for not applying fundamental principles, whereas he could have done so in some other way. The more closely a treaty endeavours to provide for the smallest detail, the more loosely it binds the contracting parties, who are furnished with just so many opportunities of evading the spirit by arguing about the letter.

While overmuch detail in a convention often limits its scope, it may also involve sometimes a degree of surrender. Most of the detailed provisions which have been added to the original conventions have their origin in the disregard of general principles. Rulings on matters of detail were intended to limit the violation of principles, but to limit such violations is already to admit them.

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"Would it not be possible" to strengthen the authority and the powers of the International Committee in time of war?

Such a course is in any case desirable.

It remains to be seen how far it is possible to perfect an executive organ which shall act as intermediary in wars that may break out no one knows when nor where, since none can foresee what needs they will create, nor what means of action will then subsist.

Material reinforcement is to a certain extent feasible. The permanent maintenance of complete machinery, ready to function the moment hostilities break out, in all the fields where the Committee may be called upon to act, cannot of course be contemplated. Nothing can ensure that this machinery—which would of course be costly—could function adequately at a crisis; it might be necessary to start everything afresh, in another place, or on other foundations. On the other hand, one can contemplate a reinforcement of the Committee's permanent secretariat, thus making it possible, in case of war, to reduce improvisation to a minimum.

For this purpose, funds will be required. The International Committee must not again be placed in the situation it was in
before the recent war. It must be able to draw on financial reserves, allowing it to organize rapidly not only a "Central Agency", but also other departments which may be required in the first days of the war. Regular contributions must preserve the Committee from financial anxiety throughout the duration of its activity.

This anxiety beset the Committee all through the late War, but it never let the financial situation dictate its policy. Having decided to undertake some new scheme, it did not begin by asking Governments concerned for financial help. It did not waste time in drafting budgets, so as to adjust its schemes to financial contributions received. It simply went forward, believing that the money would be forthcoming. If funds were a long time coming, the Committee turned to the nearest sources. Thus it was that the Government, people and National Red Cross of Switzerland alone met more than half the Committee's expenditure throughout the duration of the war.

That is not a proper state of affairs. Switzerland, which was spared by the War, was no doubt anxious, like other neutral countries, to help in various ways the victims of the great catastrophe. One of these ways was to give financial support to the Committee's work. No doubt, too, as a non-belligerent, Switzerland could do this in a perfectly disinterested fashion. That does not alter the fact that such a course was abnormal.

It is not normal that the Committee should be threatened with compulsory stoppage of its customary work because one of the belligerent parties, while agreeing to the pursuit of these undertakings, no longer considers it a matter of national interest to support them financially, whereas the other party, for whom they are indispensable, can no longer contribute towards their cost.

If a Government or a welfare society requests the Committee to forward relief supplies on their behalf to members of a particular nation or group, it is logical that special contributions should be made available to cover the cost. The Committee is happy to render such services, by which human lives are saved, although they often create a feeling of injustice among those who are not benefited and lead them to the mistaken supposition
that the Committee is acting unfairly in the issue of relief, whereas it is simply carrying out the express desires and conditions set forth by the donors. The chief duty of the International Committee—its traditional duty—is to assist war-victims in proportion to their needs alone, whenever its aid is asked for and wherever it can carry it. To be equal to that task, and to fulfil it in the Red Cross spirit, the Committee must be able to count on regular contributions from all, according to individual possibilities, and no matter who is benefiting at the moment, by such work.

This can only happen if the subscribers—Governments, National Societies or individuals—are interested in the Committee's activities, by reason of the principle which the latter embody, and not on account of any advantage to be gained thereby.

Can the Committee be strengthened by becoming more truly international?

This question has been raised on several occasions, and is being raised again today. This course is quite natural: it may well seem peculiar that a body which is called upon in war-time to perform such important intermediary functions between belligerents (and even in their territory), should still be exclusively composed of citizens of a single country. People are enquiring whether the authority of this body would not be heightened by the inclusion of other nationals—a change which would also make it more representative of the Red Cross as a whole. Another advantage has been pointed out: if citizens of various countries were, in peace-time, to participate in the work of the International Committee, this would enable them to ensure the survival of the Committee and the pursuit of its task, should Switzerland become involved in a war.

The question is therefore by no means new. The Committee itself has sometimes raised the matter, for nothing which could increase its efficacy leaves it indifferent. Besides, none of its members believe that Switzerland has a monopoly of what is generally called "the Red Cross spirit". To constitute an International Red Cross Committee, there is no need of men and
women of genius, nor even of particular talents. A few people of good will, true to the Red Cross ideal and conscious of the independence and neutrality which alone enable the Committee to carry out its duties, are sufficient. Such men and women are to be found in every country.

The present status and position of the International Committee, it is true, did not spring from a decision of the Red Cross as a whole. It was not decided, on any particular day, to create a special body, able to act in time of war as a neutral intermediary. It was not laid down that, to perform this duty, the Committee must be set up in Switzerland and be composed of Swiss citizens only.

The present status of the Committee is, in mathematical parlance, a resultant—the confirmation of a factual situation created by events.

At the outset, the body which was to become the International Committee was no more than a local society for the relief of wounded combatants—one of the committees advocated by Dunant, equal to those which arose spontaneously in other countries after the Conference of 1863. It was a small committee among others—the first in point of time, and nothing more. Because it was the first, and because it brought about the meeting from which the Red Cross sprang, the others considered it from the outset as the guardian of the Red Cross principle, and the international link between them.

And then, on the occasion of successive wars, this Committee offered its services. It sent relief supplies here, intervened there, conceived the idea of an Information Agency. It started schemes which others could have set up; because it started them, it was expected to pursue them, and was invited to do so. Thus a tradition grew up. Each fresh undertaking gave it the additional prestige which enabled it to embark upon others, and gradually to enlarge—to what point the reader knows—the scope of its activity. And when in 1928, the International Red Cross gave itself a legal status, it confirmed the position the Committee had thus acquired.

Since the International Committee, as it stands, was not deliberately founded with a view to filling its actual rôle, we may
ask whether it is not precisely because of its peculiar nature, that the Committee was able to do what it has done?

To put the question is not to answer it. Neither is this brief survey the place where it can be settled, nor where the arguments for and against internationalization can be set forth. In accordance with a resolution passed by the Preliminary Red Cross Conference of 1946, the matter has been referred to a special commission, and it will devolve on the International Red Cross Conference of 1948 to make a decision. It is interesting to note that hitherto it has always been finally decided to maintain the status quo, yet, after the war which has recently devastated the world, it was natural and desirable that the question should be taken up once more and most thoroughly studied.

Can the Committee's position be strengthened in the Conventions?

The idea is attractive. What was done in respect of the Agency in 1929 would be extended to other fields; the Committee would enjoy the right to propose or undertake definite pieces of work, for which it might even be made responsible. The Committee's agents—i.e. the delegates hitherto subjected to all the formalities of permits, visas, authorizations—would be given a status, diplomatic or otherwise, and have their powers defined. Suggestions of this kind have been made, and are being examined.

Strange as it may seem, there is no evidence that such a course would strengthen the Committee's authority or increase its means of action. It may even be asked whether the seeming weakness of the Committee is not, in reality, part of its strength. What was said above is true here also: overmuch detail often leads to restriction. Treaty stipulations that the Committee can do one thing or another may furnish belligerents with an excuse to prevent its doing a third thing, which ought nevertheless to be done.

There is yet another risk. The care of the wounded, the treatment of prisoners of war, the furnishing of supplies to civilian populations, in short, the implementing of treaties,
devolve upon Governments which have powers and means, and which are signatory to the Conventions. Red Cross work in this field should maintain its character of emergency aid and relief. To recognize or confirm too precisely the rights and duties of the International Committee, to grant it too much power, would involve a risk of relieving Governments of their obligations, or at least of providing them with the semblance of an excuse for laying them down. On to whom would these obligations then devolve? On an institution which, even if better equipped, would lack the material resources of a sovereign State.

Too precise definition might also lead to another risk, that of conferring upon the Committee a legal monopoly. Such a monopoly would certainly be gratifying, but not necessarily beneficial to the Red Cross, that is to say, to the people requiring help. Through force of circumstances, the International Committee is invested in certain spheres (the visiting of prisoner of war camps, for example) with a kind of practical monopoly. Although it has claimed the right to act, it has never demanded this monopoly. In this connection, we note with pleasure the fact that when the International Committee asked the Preliminary Conference of 1946, whether National Societies too ought not to take up the case of enemy prisoners in their own territory, the reply was unanimously in the affirmative.

Experts are, of course, needed everywhere, and the International Committee is an expert of a kind. But when it is a matter of relieving distress, the presence of experts must never prevent anyone from contributing his share of help, if he is anxious and able to do so.

For the Red Cross constitutes a whole.

* * *

These few remarks must be kept in mind when studying the means of amending the Conventions and reinforcing the authority or the powers of the International Committee.

Here is another point which must not be lost sight of: however carefully drafted, treaty stipulations have no other value than
that of the principles they embody. Whatever its status, its composition or its means of action, the International Committee will never have any power except that of the idea which it serves.

We must return to the original idea, and to the principle laid down in 1864. These must find more precise expression, be restored if necessary, and extended to meet the demands of modern times, but they must not be adulterated. Such is the conclusion to be drawn from the preceding observations; such is the constructive work which must be undertaken.

*But nobody can build on sand!*

The Red Cross can be likened to an unpretentious, but strongly built mansion, erected in 1863-1864. The foundations were laid rapidly, because the soil—as everybody thought at the moment—was firm. Since then the mansion has been enlarged. Two earthquakes have inflicted slight damage, but it still stands. Today is must be enlarged again.

Let us admit that the soil, too, was shaken.

It is upon *universality* alone that we can lay the firm foundations which the enlarged mansion requires. Not merely geographic universality, in which the emblem is recognized everywhere, but has not everywhere the same meaning; rather universality in which the emblem, wherever it is recognized, may express the same ideas—and all the same ideas.
CHAPTER XI

"SONO MADRE"—I AM A MOTHER

A firm soil: universality.
A mansion that has been reinforced and enlarged: principles that have been restated and broadened.
Better instruments: the Conventions, revised and extended; the authority and the resources of the International Committee augmented.
Is that really all that is required?

Throughout a war which was the flat negation of the worth of human personality—the very corner-stone of the Red Cross—and which sometimes openly attacked the most hallowed principles of humanity, the fact remains that a small company of men and women, members of the International Committee in 1939, who had neither material power, weapons, nor financial resources, saw their numbers grow to four thousand. Relying on the fragile basis of a few treaty stipulations, they succeeded in accomplishing what they did.

On second thoughts, it appears almost incredible. The ventures of the Red Cross should, it seems, have suffered early shipwreck; there were too many impassable obstacles. But now the figures quoted take on their full significance; almost nothing remains visible, save positive achievement.

How was this made possible?
The explanation might well be found among the avalanches of mail received at Geneva from the four corners of the world. We pick out an envelope at random; the address is: "Mrs. Red Cross, Geneva". The letter: "My dear Geneva, I hasten to write to you to send you news of myself... I hope that after
the war I shall come and spend a day with you, so that I can make your acquaintance. Would you like that? I should be glad to have a photo of yourself...”.

The suggestive power of figures is limited. A single prisoner conjures up a tragic situation that can be grasped: the man and his distress, his relatives and their anxiety. Ten prisoners mean that tragic situation multiplied tenfold. But a million prisoners are nothing more than a row of figures. We are struck by the size of the number, and say, “Poor fellows!” Perhaps we send a few dollars or shillings to those who are trying to help them. Suppose that among that crowd you have a son, a brother or a friend; your distress is similar to his, and you do all you can to send him help yourself; you spend for a single man alone a hundred times more than you gave for a whole million...

In front of an index-catalogue holding millions of single cards, totalling an unbelievable sum of distress, workers are busy sorting and checking as if each card represented a living man they handle each item as if it really concerned a son, a brother or a friend of their own, and repeat that effort ten, twenty, forty, sixty times a day—for one year, for two years, for seven years!

There are workers who are busy organizing collective relief-work for a hundred thousand men, and who can reduce that figure to a single one, whom they make their friend; they then only have to multiply what that personal friendship would have them do.

Then, in his prison camp, from the depths of his distress or his solitude, a man understands that somewhere on earth, one friend at least knows about his wretchedness and is looking after him in particular. Then perhaps he writes: “Mrs. Red Cross”.

“Mrs. Red Cross” is present everywhere in the world, in each National Society as well as at Geneva. Her name covers all those helpers, from the docker handling relief parcels to the nurse in the field-hospital at the front, among the Northern ice or in the tropical jungle. Nothing, neither the monotony nor the vastness of their task, neither its risks nor its thankless nature, can daunt them; should you express surprise at such selflessness, they can only reply in the two words of the women
of Solferino: "Sono madre", "I am a mother", or "I am a wife, a father, a brother, or a friend".

As long as people can write to an institution as if it were a good and beautiful woman, that institution is certainly on the right track. Shall we enlarge it, strengthen it, multiply one hundred-fold its present means of action? On the day when no one asks for "her photograph", it will have lost the greater part of its power, because it will have lost its spirit.

For the love of a mother or a wife, the persistency of a father, the filial spirit of a son and the warmth of a friend can triumph over obstacles against which the most powerful administration is impotent.

Two World Wars, industrial development pushed to the very extreme, and other circumstances too—everything, apparently—conspire to lead humanity towards a new world in which the individual shall be no more than the merest fraction of a mass, bereft of individual dignity as a human being, and where he will have no more value than an interchangeable cog in a huge machine. Some may ask whether, in these circumstances, the Red Cross is not out of date, a curiosity to be put in a glass case in a historical museum, before the pitiless march of events reduces it to being no more than one particular body of officials among so many others.

No, that cannot, shall not be. Whatever the world of tomorrow, "Mrs. Red Cross" will still be there.

Because, to abandon her task would be to admit the justification of the concentration camps and the giant crematoria, to accept in advance atomic weapons, compared to which the worst "experiment" of this last war would seem no more than a childish toy.

Because there will always be mothers.

Because if a country may, in certain circumstances, give its sons the transient order: "Go and kill", nothing can annul that other, everlasting command, which bids every man who sees one of his fellows, even his enemy, lying by the roadside: "Stop, and go to his rescue!"