

## Sweden

On the occasion of its centenary, celebrated last year and of which the *International Review* published an account in December 1965, the Swedish Red Cross has produced a handsome volume on its history and work.<sup>1</sup> In this is described the remarkable development of that National Society which has not only become the country's most important welfare movement, but by its many generous interventions and contributions on behalf of the victims of conflicts and disasters in Europe and other parts of the world has merited the high esteem of the international community.

In an initial chapter on "human dignity and nursing care in time of war", the author describes the development of humanitarian ideas from the earliest days and quotes a little known text on that subject. This comes from an Icelandic saga connected with an episode said to have taken place in the year 1001 and reads as follows :

" Halldora Gunnsteinsdottir was the wife of Glumur who was a great warrior and had many enemies. During one of his last fights, he met his worst enemy, Porarinn. Halldora, Glumur's wife, was also present. She called the other women around her and said to them : " We will bandage the wounds of those men whose lives can be saved, on whichever side they are fighting." This was in fact done and she herself took personal care of Porarinn who had been seriously wounded. She treated him until the battle was over and thus saved his life ".

From this humanitarian spirit, whose roots are so deep in the Scandinavian neutrality, the creation and development of the Red Cross have given many other examples. Two Swedes took part in the Geneva Conference which founded the Red Cross in October 1863, of whom one, Dr. Sven Sköldberg, gave an account in a book

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<sup>1</sup> Svenska Röda Korset, by Sten Söderberg, AB Svensk Literstur, Stockholm, 1965, 504 p.

in which he also included the translation of important extracts of Dunant's work, *A Memory of Solferino*. The Kingdom of Norway and Sweden also took part in the 1864 Diplomatic Conference, although its representative did not have full powers authorizing him to sign the Convention. King Charles V acceded to it however at the end of that year. Also, on January 27, 1865, there took place the first meeting, presided over by Prince Oskar, of the Society which was to become the Swedish Red Cross.

It is striking to observe how ever since its beginnings that National Society had the feeling of international fellowship. This was particularly the case during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. The Swedish Red Cross then organized a large collection for the victims and sent two doctors to France to care for the wounded.

Since then, the Swedish Red Cross greatly increased its interventions abroad. From 1903 its work was inspired by the "Blue Prince", so-called because of the dragoon guards uniform worn by Prince Charles, Gustav V's brother. From the fighting which took place in the Balkans at the end of the Second World War, he bestowed much prestige on the National Society over which he presided. The Swedish Red Cross was at that time the effective instrument of a neutral country determined to give generous aid to the victims of so many conflicts. In this activity in which there were also casualties, since it cost the lives of some of its delegates and assistants, it frequently co-operated with the ICRC.

In this connection all will remember the fine work carried out in 1945 during the last years of the war by Count Folke Bernadotte, who had become Prince Charles' right-hand man.

At home also, the Swedish Red Cross has continued to do good work. Being supported by all levels of the population, it collects the nation's goodwill around it. It instituted nursing as a profession in Sweden and which, in a country where the organizing spirit is carried to a high pitch, has taken over a great deal of relief and welfare work which are not the State's concern. It is due to that National Society that Sweden possesses mobile dental services for children, ambulance aircraft and a large number of homes for the aged, cripples, the sick and handicapped children, to mention only some of its achievements in the field of human fellowship.

Those who serve the Red Cross everywhere will endorse the words spoken by Prince Bertil at the opening ceremony of the centenary in 1965 in Stockholm : " In a world in which we all have need of each other, we also need the Red Cross idea and the Red Cross has need of us all ".

R. D. P.

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## VIETNAM

*We know that the Iranian Red Lion and Sun Society has sent to South Viet Nam a medical team which is giving valuable assistance in difficult circumstances.*

*Last April, Panorama, the League of Red Cross Societies' Review, published an article by Mr. C. Rooks on that subject, some passages of which are given below. This Iranian team arrived in Viet Nam in January 1966.*

At Ben Tre, Kien Hoa Province, a twenty-member Iranian medical team is bringing the benefits of modern surgery to thousands of Vietnamese peasant farmers who would otherwise go unattended in this Mekong Delta city, 84 kilometers south of Saigon.

Staffed by two surgeons, Doctors Siamak Shakibi and Reza Soleymani, two technicians and fifteen nurses, the team is headed by Colonel Esmahail Gilanpour. The team is sponsored by the Iranian Red Lion and Sun Society. The provincial hospital at Ben Tre is the only medical facility for the 600,000 inhabitants of the province.

Many surgical problems of the area are being attended to for the first time in more than a dozen years by the Iranians.

The last surgeon in the community, a French doctor, left following the Geneva agreements in 1954.