



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA MONTHLY LETTER

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## *The Red Cross Centenary*

TO RED CROSS the people of the world are divided into those who are fortunate enough to be able to give help and those who need help. It has been so for a hundred years, and today more than three million Canadian members are dedicated to assisting victims of war, disaster, disease, famine and misfortune of many kinds.

Because of the very magnitude of its work and the great number of its activities, the image of Red Cross tends to become blurred. Its hundredth birthday seems to be a good time to bring the picture back into focus.

This association of people, moved by the high virtue of charity, is the busiest and farthest-flung instrument of privately financed mercy in the history of the world. It is a staunchly private organization, subsisting on voluntary contributions of time, talent and money. It is not governmental, and it makes no discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion or political ideology.

Since its organization, Red Cross has been in the thick of every war and every natural calamity. Some of its work is danger-ridden, like picking up wounded on the battlefield, and that service is properly given lustrous laurels by all civilized mankind. But it serves in a hundred other, less spectacular but none the less life-saving, ways.

This cannot be done without rubbing some people the wrong way. The nature of Red Cross work demands organization if it is to carry out the far-flung humanitarian relief that is needed. Its material gifts must be fitting to their purpose, properly packed, despatched on time, and efficiently stored. Its personal services must be given by people who have qualified themselves, are available at the right place and time, and perform their work without partiality and as members of a team. And it must come to the public every year for contributions which make all this possible.

But whatever criticism is made, and it is remarkably small considering the world-wide nature and all-embracing services of this voluntary endeavour, the Red Cross remains humanity's greatest example of humanitarian progress. Within it there is no room for the petty prejudices and cold selfishness of race to-

ward race, but only for a great dedication to the expansion of human well-being.

### *How it started*

The Red Cross owes its origin, says the *Harmsworth Encyclopaedia*, to the upwelling of sympathy roused throughout Europe by the sufferings of the wounded in the Crimean War (1854-6) and in the Austrian-Italian wars, especially at the battle of Solferino (1859) where there were 40,000 dead and wounded after fifteen hours of fighting.

Henri Dunant, of Geneva, was nearby on that June day. He worked alone among the wounded in the church at Castiglione for hours, but was unable to keep up with the flow of men with damaged bodies. He went out into the streets and got together a group of women to work with him.

Three years later, in 1862, Dunant published a little book, *Un souvenir de Solferino*, in which he told the harrowing story of the battle and its aftermath. Then he wrote: "But why have I told of all these scenes of pain and distress, and perhaps aroused painful emotions in my readers? . . . It is a natural question. Perhaps I might answer it by another: Would it not be possible, in time of peace and quiet, to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers?"

The book was translated into several languages, and in 1863 a conference in Geneva was attended by representatives of sixteen European states. It recommended that relief societies be formed in every country, to be authorized by the national governments to cooperate with the army medical services.

It is fitting that when the Nobel Prize was awarded for the first time, Henri Dunant was one of the recipients. He died in 1910, aged 82, and was buried at Zurich, Switzerland.

### *Development of Red Cross*

While Europe had been awakened to the need, and had declared in favour of measures to meet it, there

was much to be done before effective work could be carried out.

One of the first principles had to do with protection of those who should volunteer. An emblem was needed which would demand and receive unqualified recognition. Because it was a Swiss national who had proposed the movement, and because Switzerland, one of the smallest states in Europe, had so cordially invited the convention to meet within its borders, it was agreed to acknowledge the courtesy by using the flag of Switzerland, but in reverse colours.

At a convention in August 1864, diplomatic representatives of 26 governments agreed to the Geneva Convention. It provided that the wounded were to be respected, military hospitals were to be regarded as neutral, the personnel and material of the medical services were to be accorded protection.

The Convention was revised in 1907 so as to cover sea warfare, in 1929 to cover the treatment of prisoners of war, and in 1949 to cover civilians.

By the time of the Armistice in 1918 the Red Cross had attained a position of primary importance in the world. In 1919, a Committee of Red Cross Societies was formed with the aim "to work out and propose to the Red Cross Societies a programme of action on behalf of the general welfare of humanity."

The League of Red Cross Societies was founded. Starting with 26 societies, it now has 88 societies with 157,000,000 members throughout the world.

This was a critical period, because so many people believed that the League of Nations had banished war and that therefore the Red Cross was no longer needed. The Red Cross maintained its stand that so long as there was even the remote chance of war it was pledged to preparedness, and, in any event, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse do not ride only in wartime. The humanitarian impulse which had given birth to the Red Cross should be pressed forward into the prevention and alleviation of human suffering in all forms at all times.

### *International volunteers*

The Red Cross is not an organization of ideas alone, but of acts. In times of famine, epidemics, cyclones, earthquakes and floods, the Red Cross has proved to be a reliable instrument for prompt and effective material assistance. Throughout some bitterly discouraging years, it has pioneered in the improvement of relations between countries by eliminating ill will, suspicion, jealousy and red tape. It has led the way in bringing about a feeling for the underlying community of human interests. It has given a practical demonstration of democracy by drawing together groups from various nations to solve their common problems.

The Red Cross is not a government; it is not a bureaucracy. It is made up of individual people all over the world possessed of the desire to achieve in a great common cause. They are people of all races and

interests and social classes who have come together to work for things which they believe in.

Depending on their individual skills, volunteers in every country perform office duties, run errands for patients in hospitals, serve as nurses' aides or recreation supervisors or coffee dispensers at the scene of disasters; they drive veterans to ball games, make bandages and layettes, act as aides in the collection of blood for transfusions, or help to raise funds. Meanwhile, they undergo training so that they will be able to do more than merely wring their hands if a local or national disaster strikes.

Thousands are persons with professional skills essential to the agency's work. Physicians, nurses, social welfare workers, teachers and nutritionists contribute time as instructors and are available in emergencies. Business executives direct local fund drives and serve on committees and boards.

### *Organization of Red Cross*

A world wide movement must have at least a skeleton organization to pull together its many activities. In the Red Cross this consists of five divisions: The International Conference of the Red Cross, which is the supreme deliberative authority; the Standing Commission, which ensures continuity of co-ordination; the International Committee of the Red Cross, a neutral, independent institution composed of 25 Swiss citizens, which works for continual improvement of the Geneva Conventions; the League of Red Cross Societies, which is a world federation of 88 Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies, and the national Red Cross Societies with their many branches.

The International Committee, direct successor of the committee which, in 1863, undertook the task of putting Dunant's ideas into practice, can be called humanity's intermediary in time of war, civil war and internal disturbances. It is an institution which is private, independent and strictly neutral in all political, ideological and religious matters. Its intervention is intended to ensure respect for war victims in their capacity as human beings, and to give them moral and material assistance.

This committee has no governing functions, though it is the principal agent of international humanitarian law. It develops this law by preparing drafts for the introduction of new provisions or the revision of existing ones.

The committee has a special function of great importance: the oversight of conditions under which prisoners of war live. At the end of 1946, its card index relating to prisoners and internees included about 39 million cards. The committee reunites, or helps to reunite, members of families dispersed by war events.

Because of its undoubted neutrality and integrity, the International Committee is ideally situated to be the body which centralizes, forwards and distributes

relief supplies. It affords a guarantee to the donors that such supplies will be distributed equitably in accordance with their wishes.

### *The League*

Formation of the League of Red Cross Societies in 1919, and the consequent broadening of the programme of the Red Cross to include the relief of suffering in peace as well as in war, led to a more general acceptance of the Red Cross idea throughout the world.

As stated in its statutes, the League's duties are: to act as permanent liaison agent between national Red Cross societies; to co-operate in all spheres of their work, especially for the improvement of health, the prevention of disease and the mitigation of suffering; to represent and speak for the national societies on the international level in accord with resolutions adopted by the board of governors; to encourage and facilitate the establishment and the development of activities of national societies; to be the guardian of the integrity and interests of the member societies.

A fundamental principle of the League is absolute freedom from political or religious discrimination. Its expenses are met by voluntary contributions from its constituent societies. It maintains close liaison with organizations whose work is of interest to the Red Cross, notably the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

Of the League's work it may be said that it is achieving one of the noblest aspirations of humanity: the establishment of closer ties, true understanding and a spirit of brotherly service among all nations.

### *National societies*

And now we come back to the national society, the bed-rock of Red Cross work.

In the organization of the Red Cross at Geneva a hundred years ago it was agreed that the societies of the various countries would do more effective work if they were national instead of international in character. The treaty provides that in every country forming a national society there shall be a central committee, recognized by its own government and by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The central national committee is expected to encourage the formation of local branches and to be responsible for their work; to provide supplies to be used in emergencies; to have a trained force of workers ready to go into action at any moment; and in time of war it must not only distribute supplies but send doctors, nurses and assistants into the field.

The Canadian Red Cross Society is making a very significant contribution to national life. Founded in 1896 and affiliated with the League of Red Cross Societies in 1919, it has now 1,646,964 senior members and 1,511,045 junior members.

Its purpose, as described in the Canadian Red Cross Society Act, is: to furnish volunteer aid to the sick and wounded of armies in war; in time of peace or war to carry on and assist in work for the improvement of health, the prevention of disease and the mitigation of suffering throughout the world.

The biggest disaster activity recorded in the *Annual Report* for 1961 was the establishment of food and first aid stations in Newfoundland during the 107 days of forest fire which involved 13,000 residents in 37 communities. In addition, immediate emergency relief was made available from coast to coast to smaller groups and individual families who had encountered disaster, usually in the form of fires.

The good fortune of Canada in escaping disasters which worked havoc in so many other countries left the Red Cross free to carry on its constructive and preventive work. The full-time nursing staff was the same as in the preceding year, 168 nurses serving in the Outpost hospitals, nursing stations and the blood transfusion service. All divisions pressed ahead with instruction in home nursing and homemaker service in 5,502 homes, water safety service with 3,686 instructors participating, the operation of eight lodges for relatives visiting veterans in hospital, the instruction of 15,000 veterans in arts and crafts, visiting bed-ridden patients, and a host of other projects.

Knitted and sewn articles are made by women in Red Cross branches and assembled for emergency relief at home and abroad. In 1961 the bulk of this product of generous hands went to Africa, the Middle East and the Far East.

### *Junior Red Cross*

Among the 75 countries having Junior Red Cross sections, Canada holds an eminent place.

Recognized as an in-school programme in all ten provinces, with more than a million and a half members in 43,000 class-room branches, the Junior Red Cross devotes itself to carrying on humanitarian work for young people at home and abroad. As an important by-product, the movement develops a sense of responsibility in children by encouraging them to think of and help children less fortunate than themselves.

They gave this help, in 1961, to more than 17,000 Canadian children. Their contributions provided heart surgery, special drugs, eye glasses, hearing aids, dental care, wheel chairs and orthopaedic appliances. They sent help to needy children in 23 countries. They exchanged correspondence, albums, recordings and art with their counterparts in forty countries. They helped in community hospitals, crippled children's homes, senior citizens' homes, child welfare centres and veterans' hospitals. The most ambitious effort of the year was the "Adopt-a-Greek-School" project, through which 379 chests were made, filled with school supplies, and shipped to the Greek Red Cross.

## *International Service*

There are no boundaries in the Red Cross world. As soon as needs for a disaster area are made known to the Canadian Red Cross an efficient group of relief people begin assembling the required supplies, and through the co-operation of the Royal Canadian Air Force and domestic and international air lines the packages are rushed to the scene of the disaster without charge for transportation. In 1961 there were 39 countries given aid, and 892 missing persons were located for their relatives.

The largest effort was required in behalf of the victims of the hurricane in British Honduras. A relief fund raised under chairmanship of the President of the Royal Bank was handed to the Red Cross for expenditure on emergency supplies and building materials. The Women's Work Committee shipped 82 cases of clothing, and the Junior Red Cross sent clothing, health kits and school supplies. Two Canadian workers helped the local branch of the British Red Cross Society.

Doctors and nurses of the Canadian Red Cross teams were commended by the International Committee and the League for their work in the Congo, and presented with commemorative medals.

This was a memorable episode in Red Cross history. The Secretary General of the United Nations appealed to the International Red Cross for doctors and nurses to staff the hospitals and medical centres which had been vacated by the Belgians. Within a week 27 teams were on their way, each consisting of a general surgeon, a physician with training and experience in tropical medicine, and three nurses. Two Canadian teams were among the first to arrive at Leopoldville, followed by an anaesthetist and a medical director for the Congolese Blood Transfusion Service. Most of these were from the Province of Quebec, because they spoke French.

The praise of the late Dag Hammarskjold, then Secretary General of the United Nations, is noteworthy: "Of all the demands of emergency aid to which the Red Cross has been asked to respond in recent years, none has involved so much individual sacrifice as meeting the appeal for assistance in the Congo." These medical teams, he went on to say, inspired by the highest humanitarian motives, have saved hundreds of lives and averted what might easily have become a medical catastrophe. He concluded: "In recognition of this great humanitarian work, inspired by Red Cross founder Henri Dunant, I wish to express my personal gratitude — and I am sure the gratitude of men of goodwill everywhere — for yet another demonstration of the untiring and selfless response of Red Cross workers to relieve human suffering."

## *Life-saving blood*

An article in *CIL Oval* said several years ago: "Giving blood is the simplest way in which an indi-

vidual can serve others. It takes about half an hour of your time. It is harmless: in fact it often has a slight beneficial effect."

Canadian Red Cross has a national blood transfusion service unique in its completeness.

During World War II the Canadian Red Cross Society collected blood from volunteer donors so that members of the armed forces might have adequate quantities of dried serum for the treatment of casualties. Then the Red Cross was approached by a number of hospital associations and departments of health with a request that similar service should be provided in peace time to meet civilian hospital needs.

Red Cross took on the task of collecting, processing, storing and delivering blood of the right type to the right place at the right time. Its purpose is to supply every hospital in Canada, free of charge, with whole blood and blood products to meet their transfusion therapy needs.

This is the achievement of hundreds of thousands of men and women who give their blood voluntarily, regularly and anonymously as donors, who serve as volunteers in clinics and in the workrooms preparing supplies. A total of 679,319 bottles of blood was collected in 1961.

Red Cross, which maintains medically competent personnel — physicians, nurses and technicians — in its depots and laboratories, helped by voluntary non-technical workers, refuses either to pay for or charge for the blood that it collects from volunteer donors and distributes to hospitals. The provincial governments provide the premises and maintain them, the Red Cross provides the staff and equipment, and citizens donate their blood. The Women's Work Committees, assisted by Junior Red Cross branches, have manufactured all the surgical supplies such as swabs, wipes and dressings, used by the service in its depots and donor clinics.

This brief outline of the Red Cross on the occasion of its Centenary has omitted scores of references which might have been made to the work done during the Moroccan paralysis epidemic, to which the Canadian Red Cross contributed 17 specially qualified doctors and physiotherapists (more than any other country except Switzerland), 1,156 Junior Red Cross relief kits, and many thousands of items for hospital and rehabilitation use. The story has not mentioned the drugs and supplies and the hospital bedding contributed by Canadian Red Cross to Hungarian refugees, or the Sibli Vocational Training Centre, in Lebanon, made possible by gifts from Canada. It has not gone into detail about the Red Cross physicians and nurses and helpers who served in the wars in which Canada was engaged.

Organized in 1863 for the relief of wounded soldiers, the Red Cross has given that task every attention, and it has extended its work of mercy into peace time. As Mr. Hammarskjold said, it has won the gratitude of men of goodwill everywhere.