

THE RED CROSS  
OF THE  
GENEVA CONVENTION.

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*WHAT IT IS.*

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BY CLARA BARTON.



WASHINGTON, D. C. :  
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THE RED CROSS

*To the People of the United States, Senators and Representatives in Congress:*

Having had the honor conferred upon me of appointment by the Central Commission holding the Geneva Convention to present that treaty to this Government, and to take in charge the formation of a National organization according to the plan pursued by the committees working under the treaty, it seems to me but proper, that while I ask the Government to sign it, the people and their representatives should be made acquainted with its origin, designs, methods of work, &c. To this end I have prepared the following statement, and present it to my countrymen and women, hoping they will be led to indorse and sustain a benevolence so grand in its character, and already almost universal in its recognition and adoption by the civilized world.

CLARA BARTON,

*Washington, D. C.*

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## WHAT THE RED CROSS IS.

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A confederation of Relief Societies in different countries, acting under the Geneva Convention, carries on its work under the sign of the Red Cross. The aim of these societies is to ameliorate the condition of wounded soldiers in the armies in campaign on land or sea, and to furnish relief in cases of great national calamity.

The societies had their rise in the conviction of certain philanthropic men, that the official sanitary service in wars is usually insufficient, and that the charity of the people, which at such times exhibits itself munificently, should be organized for the best possible utilization. An International Public Conference was called at Geneva, Switzerland, in 1863, which, though it had not an official character, brought together representatives from a number of governments. At this conference a treaty was drawn up, afterwards remodeled and improved, which twenty-five governments have signed.

The treaty provides for the neutrality of all sanitary supplies, ambulances, surgeons, nurses, attendants, and sick or wounded men, and their safe conduct, when they bear the sign of the organization, viz: the Red Cross.

Although the convention which originated the organization was necessarily international, the Relief Societies themselves are *entirely national* and independent; each one governing itself and making its own laws, according to the genius of its nationality and needs.

The sign of the Red Cross was adopted because it was necessary for recognizance and safety, and for carrying out the general provisions of the treaty, that a uniform badge should be agreed upon. The Red Cross was chosen out of compliment to the Swiss Republic, where the first convention was held, and in which the Central Commission has its headquarters. The Swiss colors being a white cross on a red ground, the badge chosen was these colors reversed.

There are no "members of the Red Cross," but only members of societies whose *sign* it is. There is no "*Order of the Red Cross.*" The Relief Societies use, each according to its convenience, whatever methods seem best suited to prepare in times of peace for the necessities of sanitary service in times of war. They gather and store gifts of money and supplies; arrange hospitals, ambulances, methods of transportation of wounded men, bureaus of information, correspondence, &c. All that the most ingenious philanthropy could devise and execute, has been attempted in this direction.

In the Franco-Prussian war this was abundantly tested. That Prussia acknowledged its beneficence, is proven by the fact that the Emperor affixed the Red Cross to the Iron Cross of Merit.

Although the societies are not international, there is a tacit compact between them, arising from their common origin, identity of aim and mutual relation to the treaty. This compact embraces four principles, viz: centralization, preparation, impartiality and "solidarity."

1st—CENTRALIZATION. The efficiency of relief in time of war depends on unity of direction, therefore in every country the Relief Societies have a common central head to which they

send their supplies, and which communicates for them with the seat of war or with the surgical military authorities, and it is through this central commission they have governmental recognition.

2d—PREPARATION. It is understood that societies working under the Red Cross shall occupy themselves with preparatory work in times of peace. This gives them a *permanence* they could not otherwise have.

3d—IMPARTIALITY. The societies of belligerent nations cannot always carry aid to their wounded countrymen who are captured by the enemy; this is counterbalanced by the regulation that the aid of the Red Cross societies shall be extended alike to friend and foe.

4th—"SOLIDARITY." This provides that the societies of nations not engaged in war may afford aid to the sick and wounded of belligerent nations without affecting any principle of non-interference their governments may be pledged to. This must be done through the Central Commission, and not through either of the belligerent parties—this insures impartiality of relief.

That these principles are practical, has been thoroughly tested during the fifteen years the Red Cross has existed.

The "Convention" of Geneva does not exist as a *society*, but is simply a treaty under which all the relief societies of the Red Cross are enabled to carry on their work effectually. In time of war, the members and agents of the societies who go to the seat of war are obliged to have their badges *vized* by the Central Commission, and by one of the belligerents—this is in order to prevent fraud. Thus the societies and the treaty complement each other. The societies find and execute the relief, the treaty affords them the immunities which *enable* them to execute.

It is further a part of the *raison d'être* of these national relief societies to afford ready succor and assistance to sufferers in time of national or wide-spread calamities, such as plagues, cholera, yellow fever and the like, devastating fires or floods,

railway disasters, mining catastrophies, &c. The readiness of organizations like those of the Red Cross to extend help at the *instant* of need, renders the aid of quadruple value and efficiency to that gathered together hastily and irresponsibly, in the bewilderment and shock which always accompanies such calamities. The trained nurses and also attendants subject to the relief societies, in such cases would accompany the supplies sent, and remain in action as long as needed. Organized in every State, the relief societies of the Red Cross would be ready with money, nurses and supplies, to go on call to the instant relief of all who were overwhelmed by any of those sudden calamities which occasionally visit us. In case of yellow fever, there being an organization in every State, the nurses and attendants would be first chosen from the nearest societies, and being acclimated would incur far less risk to life than if sent from distant localities. It is true that the government is always ready in these times of public need to furnish transportation, and often does much more. In the Mississippi flood, a few years ago, it ordered rations distributed under the direction of army officers; in the case of the explosion at the navy-yard, it voted a relief fund, and in our recent affliction at the South, a like course was pursued. But in such cases one of the greatest difficulties is that there is no *organized* method of administering the relief which the government or liberal citizens are willing to bestow, nor trained and acclimated nurses ready to give intelligent care to the sick; or if there is organization, it is hastily formed in the time of need, and is therefore comparatively inefficient and wasteful. It would seem to be full time that, in consideration of the growth and rapidly accumulating necessities of our country, we should learn to economize our charities, and insure from them the greatest possible practical benevolence. Although we in the United States may fondly hope to be seldom visited by the calamities of war, yet the misfortunes of other nations with which we are on terms of amity appeal to our sympathies; our southern coasts are periodically visited by the scourge of

yellow fever; the valleys of the Mississippi are subject to destructive inundations; the plains of the West are devastated by grasshoppers, and our cities and country are swept by consuming fires. In all such cases, to gather and dispense the profuse liberality of our people without waste of time or material requires, the wisdom that comes of experience and permanent organization. Still more does it concern, if not our safety, at least our honor, to signify our approval of those principles of humanity acknowledged by every other civilized nation.

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*Articles of the Convention for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded in armies in the field. Signed at Geneva on the 22d of August, 1864.*

ARTICLE I. Ambulances and military hospitals shall be acknowledged to be neutral; and, as such, shall be protected and respected by belligerents so long as any sick or wounded may be therein. Such neutrality shall cease if the ambulances or hospitals shall be held by a military force.

ART. II. Persons employed in hospitals and ambulances, comprising the staff for superintendence, medical service, administration, transport of wounded, as well as chaplains, shall participate in the benefit of neutrality while so employed, and so long as there remain any wounded to bring in or to succor.

ART. III. The persons designated in the preceding article may, even after occupation by the enemy, continue to fulfill their duties in the hospital or ambulance which they serve, or may withdraw to join the corps to which they belong. Under such circumstances, when these persons shall cease from these functions, they shall be delivered by the occupying army to the outposts of the enemy. They shall have the special right of sending a representative to the headquarters of their respective armies.

ART. IV. As the equipment of military hospitals remains subject to the laws of war, persons attached to such hospitals cannot, in withdrawing, carry away articles which are not their private property. Under the same circumstances an ambulance shall, on the contrary, retain its equipment.

ART. V. Inhabitants of the country who may bring help to the wounded shall be respected and remain free. The generals of the belligerent powers shall make it their care to

inform the inhabitants of this appeal addressed to their humanity, and of the neutrality which will be the consequence of it. Any wounded man entertained and taken care of in a house shall be considered as a protection thereto. Any inhabitant who shall have entertained wounded men in his house shall be exempted from the quartering of troops, as well as from the contributions of war which may be imposed.

ART. VI. Wounded or sick soldiers, whatever their nationality, shall be cared for. Commanders-in-chief shall have the power to deliver immediately to the outposts of the enemy soldiers who have been wounded in an engagement, when circumstances permit this to be done, with the consent of both parties. Those who are recognized as incapable of serving, after they are healed, shall be sent back to their country. The others may also be sent back on condition of not again bearing arms during the continuance of the war. Evacuations, together with the persons under whose direction they take place, shall be protected by an absolute neutrality.

ART. VII. A distinctive and uniform flag shall be adopted for hospitals, ambulances and evacuated places. It must on every occasion, be accompanied by the National flag. An arm-badge shall also be allowed for individuals neutralized, but the delivery of it shall be left to military authority. The flag and arm-badge shall bear a red cross on a white ground.

ART. VIII. It is the duty of the conquering army to supervise, as far as circumstances permit, the soldiers who have fallen on the field of battle, to preserve them from pillage and bad treatment, and to bury the dead in conformity with strict sanitary rules. The contracting powers will take care that in time of war every soldier is furnished with a compulsory and uniform token, appropriate for establishing his identity. This token shall indicate his name, place of birth, as well as the army corps, regiment and company to which he belongs. In case of death, this document shall be withdrawn before his burial and remitted to the civil or military authorities of the place of enlistment or home. Lists of dead, wounded, sick and prisoners shall be communicated, as far as possible, immediately after an action, to the commander of the opposing army by diplomatic or military means.

The contents of this article, so far as they are applicable to the marine, and capable of execution, shall be observed by victorious naval forces.



