## Humanity And Diplomacy

The Accession of the United States to the International Red Cross

By JAMES LEITCH WRIGHT

Thomas Jefferson, in his inaugural address of 1801, presented the infant United States with the now well-worn phrase, no entangling alliances. His practical diplomatic experiences, and also his studies, had made him reach the same conclusion that a majority of other Americans had reached: the new world was geographically separate from the old world and should remain politically separate likewise. This principle has been one of the cornerstones of American foreign policy, especially during her early, growing years. The industrial revolution, spreading from Europe to the expanding United States, severely cracked the cornerstone, and with the arrival of the highly industrialized era of the mid twentieth-century, this cornerstone has been ground into dust, leaving few remaining traces.

It is difficult to establish an exact date at which the United States abandoned her traditional policy of hemisphere isolation for one of more active participation in world affairs. However, after the middle of the nineteenth-century, as the United States was rapidly changing from an agricultural to an industrial nation, the first faint signs could be seen, and never again would they be extinguished completely. One event which helped crack the isolationist shell was American ratification of the Geneva Convention of 1864 for the amelioration of the condition of wounded of armies in the field.

A Swiss gentleman, Henri Dunant, more than any other person helped bring about the meeting of this convention. He was travelling near the town of Solferino, Italy, which in the summer of 1859 was witness of one of history's bloodiest battles. At the end of the pitched battle, over thirty-six thousand French, Sardinian, and Austrian soldiers lay dead or wounded and, because of the lack of organized and well equipped medical facilities, many of the

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wounded experienced long hours of physical suffering, only to join their dead comrades. The heart-breaking spectacle of this unnecessary misery caused this Swiss humanitarian to meditate on a practical method of relieving some of the effects of man's brutality toward man. Shortly afterward he published A Souvenir of Solferino, a shockingly realistic and descriptive book of this carnage, which made a deep impression on the various European countries.<sup>2</sup>

Dunant's personal efforts, ably supported by influential Swiss medical, political, and military leaders, interested the Genevese Society of Public Utility in this problem which had plagued the wounded on the field of battle from the beginnings of warfare. In 1863 this Society issued invitations to various countries to participate in an international conference to be held in Geneva. This conference, of limited membership in which the United States did not participate, formulated the principles that would control the care of wounded in wartime. It provided for the neutralization of all hospitals, sanitary supplies, ambulances, nurses, attendants, and sick or wounded men. Everyone engaged in non-military relief work would wear a distinctive arm badge-a red cross on a white background. After adjournment, this limited conference issued invitations for a more general international conference to be held in Geneva in 1864, and in which the delegates of the various countries should have the power to sign a treaty binding their country to abide by the general principles drawn up in 1863.3

At first glance it would seem that the United States would be vitally concerned in this benevolent undertaking in Geneva. By 1864 the nation in its costly, fratricidal strife, had witnessed the freezing to death of her wounded on Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg; the tremendous casualities at Shiloh, Antietam, and Gettysburg; and in the first part of 1864 General Grant secured a bloody reputation from his advance on Richmond.4 But Jefferson's phrase of no entangling alliances, ringing down through the century, was to be a strong deterrent to the active participation by the United States in any international political conference, although its objects

were of the highest order.

President Lincoln's competent Secretary of State, William H. Seward, was not too engrossed with the life or death diplomacy with Great Britain and France to dictate cautious and limited instructions to George J. Fogg, the American delegate to the Geneva Convention in 1864. Fogg, a former newspaper editor and now Minister in Berne, was authorized to attend the Convention in an informal status only. Actually he was not to attend at all if there were representatives from the Confederacy present, since his pres-

ence would be tantamount to recognition of the Rebel Government.<sup>5</sup> Seward, echoing traditional American policy, forcefully declared:

Our government, while always ready to forward all humanitarian action, has a well understood policy of holding itself aloof from all European congresses or compacts of a political nature . . . . the Congress now proposed to be held at Geneva, being for the modification of international laws of war and the signing of a treaty binding upon our government, while in the midst of a war with a relentless and barbarous foe . . . [is naturally] of greater significance, and the sending of a delegate or delegates, officially empowered to represent and act for the United States . . . [is] from the very difficulties apparent, nearly or quite impossible.6

Seward felt that it was advisable for the United States to operate as a free agent in this matter. Perhaps she would later adopt treaties with individual countries incorporating the provisions of the Convention, or, conceivably, the United States would ratify it in the future. Both President Lincoln and Charles Sumner, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, concurred with Seward.7

Fogg proceeded from Berne to Geneva after receiving Seward's instructions and, arriving on the evening of September 5, 1864, was too late for the first short session. He immediately conferred with Charles S. P. Bowles who had been relieved considerably by Fogg's

appearance.

Bowles, the European agent of the American Sanitary Commission, had been in close contact with Dunant and other officials, both in Europe and the United States, interested in this merciful undertaking. His parent organization, the American Sanitary Commission, was the Federal agency which came into being to relieve the suffering of the fallen soldiers in the Civil War. Having at his fingertips the practical organization and aid administered by the Sanitary Commission, he was one of the most qualified persons present in Geneva. His position had been embarrassing until Fogg's arrival, as he was the only American present, and he had no official status whatsoever from his government.8

He informed Fogg of the situation, and together they attended the next day's session. Fogg realized the limitations of his qualifications to participate in a convention of this nature, so he secured a seat adjacent to his own for Bowles. Since Fogg's membership in the Convention was informal, he saw no reason why another Ioyal American could not share this informality. Because he was not authorized to sign the proposed Convention, neither he nor Bowles deemed it appropriate to take part in the formal debates.<sup>9</sup> There were difference of opinion on various points among the many nations present. The aged President of the Conference, General Dufour of the Swiss Army, re-emphasized the object of the meeting as "... simply the question of declaring neutral the ambulances and personnel of the sanitary services of armies in the field, as also of the wounded ... "10 This confined the goal of the Conference to approving, in general, the principles laid down by the Conference of 1863. As a result, the scope of debate was materially reduced and the sessions moved forward smoothly.

American participation, although not recorded in the debates of the proceedings, was influential nevertheless. Bowles, in particular, was of great value with his practical and theoretical knowledge. He ably presented books, pictures, and graphic descriptions of the organization and operation of the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. In several cases where there was doubt among the delegates as to the feasibility of a certain theory, Bowles was able to show how the Sanitary Commission had met successfully the same problem. The two American delegates sat next to those of France and Spain in the Convention Hall; and when their general aims coincided, these foreign delegates often would advance American arguments on the floor.11 Many of the Articles of the resulting Convention were derived from the American Instructions for the Government of Armies in the Field, which had been prepared during the Civil War for the Federal Armies.12 In their semi-official status, Fogg and Bowles to a large degree helped mold the final product.

But there was not a complete agreement with American views. For example, the Sanitary Commission was chiefly organized on a voluntary basis, and this clashed with the foundations of many of the monarchical, European governments. This voluntary participation might bring the soldier too near the people and disturb the existing order. It was generally understood in Geneva that the Emperor of France and the King of Prussia had given positive instructions that no voluntary or popular feature should be admitted.<sup>13</sup>

All differences were discussed in a spirit of harmony and conciliation, nevertheless, and each delegate appeared willing to make concessions, provided they did not violate the instructions from his home government. The wealthy citizens of Geneva, warmly supporting a good cause, vied with each other in elaborate entertainment for the delegates. In daily and nightly succession they were subject to fetes, regattas, illuminations, and excursions on beautiful Lake Geneva.<sup>14</sup>

With this spirit of purpose and good feeling prevalent, the Conference quickly finished its task and adjourned in the latter part of August. Fogg returned to his relatively quiet diplomatic post in Berne and Bowles resumed work for the Sanitary Commission. The only requirement now remaining to make the Convention completely effective was to secure its ratification by every nation. This the delegates realized would be difficult, but certainly not impossible.

Switzerland and France had taken the lead in the proceedings and were the first to ratify. They were immediately followed by Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden and Norway, Denmark, Spain, Baden, Greece, Great Britain, and Mecklenburg-Schwerin. Article IX of the Convention provided for the future admittance

of any nation which would adopt these principles.15

This attempt to put into practical operation the principles formulated by the Geneva Conference of 1863 was both national and international. There was to be an International Committee for the Relief of Wounded Soldiers permanently located in Geneva. Each member country would establish a National Red Cross Society, officially recognized by its government to carry out the conditions required by ratification. Each national society would be formed independently and, in every respect, would conform to its national laws. The International Committee would be the hub of this loose organization and in times of distress would try to coordinate rapidly and efficiently the relief donated by the national societies. The International Committee could not dictate the policy to any of the national societies. For universal recognition and safety, it would be necessary that a uniform badge, the Red Cross, be adopted by all countries.

This international organization of very limited powers was still at variance with traditional American policy. During the Conference, Fogg had not been able to discuss whether the United States would ratify or not, owing to his restricted instructions. He merely had stalled by saying that the United States probably would not ratify as long as the Civil War continued. His only recourse was to await a policy decision by the Government in Washington, but in the meantime he was in an awkward position. European nations took great interest in whether the United States would ratify, but Seward did not respond to the formal invitation to join which had been issued in November, 1864.

Little publicity was given this Convention in the United States. The public was too occupied with the critical presidential election of 1864, with Sherman's "march through Georgia," and with other pressing problems to give much attention to the happenings in remote Switzerland. Most of the pertinent literature was in French, little effort being made to translate it, and it failed to reach the

reading American public.18

Fogg still had received no reply from Seward and was succeeded by George Harrington in October, 1865. The Swiss government renewed its invitation through Harrington in 1866, and his only recourse was to forward again the invitation to Seward and await his answer. 19 In 1867 Senator Edwin Morgan, a Republican from New York, had introduced a resolution in the Senate asking the Committee on Foreign Relations to report on the feasibility of the United States' becoming a party to the Geneva Convention, 20 but no favorable action was taken. Thus, despite the high aims of the Convention and the active support given it by a few Americans, the isolationist tradition of this nation forbade her from becoming a member at this time.

Switzerland and France, being the most interested nations in the success of this ambitious project, were very anxious for the adoption of it by the United States. It was difficult for them to comprehend why one of the most progressive and enlightened nations, still nursing her grievous war wounds, would not be anxious to ratify this meritorious pact. By 1868 the United States had still not committed herself to a definite rejection or adoption of the Convention, and France made an inquiry as to her exact position.<sup>21</sup> In reply, Seward agreed that the ideals of the Convention were of the highest order, but American military authorities had always voluntarily observed its principle rules and it would not be likely for them to violate them in the future. He emphatically continued:

It has always been deemed at least a questionable policy, if not unwise, to become a party to any instrument to which there are many other parties. Nothing but the most urgent necessity should lead to a departure from this rule. It is believed the case [in question] . . . would not warrant such a course.22

Thus Seward effectively prohibited the immediate accession of the United States.

As one of the outstanding Secretaries of State, he did not believe he was committing a crime against mankind by failing to ratify this Convention. He was merely continuing a successful, fundamental principle of foreign policy which had been imbedded in the American mind from the very beginning. He had not been opposed to the representation of the United States in other international conferences of a non-political nature, such as the Postal

Congress in Paris, the Statistical Congress in Berlin, and others relating to agriculture held in different parts of Europe. But the Geneva Convention, altering the laws of war, was of a different nature.<sup>23</sup>

He was supported in this by the War Department, to which he had referred the invitation to join. This department was concerned with the proposed presence in the theater of war of non-military personnel under the protection of the International Red Cross badge, who would supposed be administering to the sick and wounded, but in reality might be spies. It was felt by some, that the risk of these spies in the theater of operations, interferring with the objects of the campaign, would be worse than an inefficient sanitary service.<sup>24</sup> No doubt this was the reason the military supported Seward's decision not to ratify the Convention.

The refusal of the United States to join caused no popular indignation at home. Probably a majority of its citizens had never heard of the Geneva Convention, and this phase of Seward's foreign policy brought forth little comment, pro or con. The dispute with Great Britain over the *Alabama* claims and the purchase of Alaska, "Seward's ice-box," were in the diplomatic headlines.

There was not complete apathy in the United States though. The Rev. Dr. Henry W. Bellows, a Unitarian Clergyman who had founded the United States Sanitary Commission, organized in 1866 in New York City, the American Association for the Relief of Misery on Battlefields. Its object was to secure the adherence of the United States to the Geneva Convention and also to become the national society which had to be recognized by the government to carry out the Convention terms. Earnest appeals were made to the people, but their response was meager. The Association lingered on for a while, furnished aid in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and then ceased to exist the following year. Since it had no official status, it could not be an effective organization.<sup>25</sup>

Clara Barton also had been active in organizing and ministering relief to Civil War wounded. While taking a rest in Switzerland under doctor's orders in 1869, she was approached by the President and members of the International Committee. They wanted to know why the United States refused to ratify the Convention. Much to her embarrassment she was forced to admit that she had never heard of the Geneva Convention and was sure that the majority of her fellow citizens also did not know that the United States had refused to ratify. She felt that if the people could only know of this benevolent undertaking the United States would be anxious to give

its approval.<sup>26</sup> From this time on, she devoted herself to gaining American ratification.

Although the International Red Cross movement was losing ground in the United States, it was progressing rapidly in Europe. By the end of 1866 twenty European states had adhered to the Convention and others continued to join, not only from Europe but from South America and the Near East as well. Another Convention had been held in Geneva in 1868 to apply, as far as possible, the rules adopted for land warfare to the Navy, but Seward had not bothered to send an informal observer to this Convention.<sup>27</sup> In the bitter Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the aid and comfort ministered by the International Red Cross sharply contrasted with the misery of the battlefield of Sedan and the siege of Paris. This helped to popularize and demonstrate the practical effectiveness of the Red Cross.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, Seward vacated his office in 1869 and another capable political leader, Hamilton Fish, became Secretary of State and served for the next eight years under President Grant. Fish shared Seward's isolationist views and therefore did not send a representative to the Brussel's Conference of 1874.29 At the invitation of the Czar of Russia, the delegates of the leading powers had met in Brussels to draft a new code of land warfare and the resulting code was known as the Declaration of Brussels. The United States, having taken little interest in the proceedings, naturally did not adhere formally to the Declaration.

When Hayes finally took office after the disputed election of 1876, the eminent Swiss jurist and President of the International Committee, Gustav Moynier, again tried to secure the ratification of the United States. Clara Barton personally presented his letter to Hayes—a letter which adroily praised American contributions in the Geneva Convention of 1864.30 But flattery was not sufficient, and Hayes' Secretary of State, William Evarts, was no more willing to break with the nation's traditional policy than had been his predecessors.

Clara Barton was not dismayed, and although in ill health, she launched a crusade for ratification. She bombarded Congressmen with arguments, wrote forceful articles, and used all her weakened energy to influence policy-making officials and public opinion.

Finally she was instrumental in founding, and subsequently was made President of, the National Society of the Red Cross, which had the same aims as the Rev. Dr. Bellows' deceased organization. First, they had to secure American ratification of the

Convention, and next they had to obtain official recognition of the National Society. Because there were several other organizations with similar aims, it was mandatory for the effectiveness of the International Red Cross that there be only one recognized society in any given country which could wear the Red Cross insignia. This time Clara Barton's Society found Congress and the public much more receptive than had the Rev. Dr. Bellows. This increased response could be due to the fact that there were fewer major events in the diplomatic headlines now, or perhaps because the entangling alliance characteristics were now being outweighed by compassionate features. The supporters of this movement worked hard and diligently, despite Hayes' rejection, and the future did

not appear as bleak as it had a decade ago.

Optimism increased when the amiable Garfield was elected President in 1880 and it bounded even higher when James G. Blaine, the "Plumed Knight," succeeded Evarts as Secretary of State. The Red Cross supporters could expect the colorful Blaine with his dynamic diplomacy to be in a receptive mood for their undertaking. So again the President of the International Committee, through the untiring Clara Barton, requested the President of the United States to become a party to the Convention.31 Garfield graciously and favorably entertained both Clara Barton and the request, and forwarded the request to the "Plumed Knight". Blaine enthusiastically approved of ratification and said he would use his influence with Congress to secure adoption. He pointed out that the Constitution had lodged the war-making powers with Congress, and since the participation of the United States in this International Convention was dependent upon and auxiliary to the war-making power of the nation, subsequent legislation by Congress would be required.32 The support given by Blaine and Congress caused the necessary steps for ratification to be set rapidly into motion.

With this encouragement, the leaders of the Red Cross movement met in Washington in May, 1881 and drew up a Constitution for the American (National) Association of the Red Cross. This was an outgrowth of the old National Society and it had their same general aims: first, government ratification of the Convention, and then government recognition of their Association. Once this had been accomplished, they could operate effectively a system of national relief which not only would relieve the sufferings of war, but other calamities also, such as famines, pestilence, and floods. This Association would be a collecting and dispersing agency for all information connected with its humanitarian work, and it would cooperate with other national societies as much as possible. The

Association had an advisory board consisting of the President of the United States and his Cabinet, the General of the Army, the Surgeon General, and the Judge Advocate General.<sup>35</sup> This advisory board would not only be of importance in the coordination of governmental and Red Cross policies, but for its prestige value as well.

Owing to the efforts of the Association, heartily backed by the administration, the possibility that the United States would become a participant in the Convention was appearing more of a reality each day. Senator Omar Conger, a Republican from Michigan, requested in May, 1881 that Blaine send the Senate the Articles of the Convention for their consideration. 4 Clara Barton intensified her publicity campaign and forcefully addressed the nation:

I would not be understood as suggesting the raising of more monies for charitable purposes; rather I am trying to save the peoples means, to economics their charities, to make their gifts do more by the prevention of needless waste . . . [thirty-one nations have signed the Convention and] if the United States of America is fortunate and diligent she may, perhaps, come to stand no. 32 in the roll of civilization and humanity. If not, she will remain where she at present stands, among the barbarian and the heathen.35

The energetic Blaine then wrote to the Swiss minister and asked him to secure sample copies of the Acts of Ratification of some of the other nations who had already ratified the Concention.<sup>36</sup> The press also took up the cause. Praising Clara Barton's work, they lamented the fact that the United States was the only great power which had not yet adopted the Convention.<sup>37</sup>

In the midst of this wave of optimism, tragedy struck with deadly swiftness. President Garfield, after only a short time in office, was the target of an assassin's bullet. Enduring an agonizing period of lingering, he finally succumbed to his wounds and his vice-president, Chester A. Arthur, received the reins of the nation.

Blaine and Garfield had held similar views, the President wholeheartily supporting Blaine's aggressive diplomacy. But Arthur was more conservative, and there soon developed a divergence of views on foreign policy between the two. Garfield had been the first President willing to ignore the entangling alliance feature of the Convention, and the Red Cross supporters were naturally anxious to know if the new President would hold similar views. He did not keep them in suspense long, and in his Annual Message to Congress in December, 1881, he upheld Garfield's position and hoped there would be "... such interest in the subject as ...

[would] result in the adhesion of the United States to that humane

and commendable engagement."38

However, the rift between the Stalwart President and the Half-Breed Secretary of State was rapidly reaching a breaking point. The final break soon came in December, 1881, and the crestfallen "Plumed Knight" sadly turned over his office to Frederick T. Frelinghuysen. But up until the final rupture, Blaine had strongly

supported American ratification.

In many ways Frelinghuysen was the antithesis of Blaine. He was generally considered a staunch conservative, and retrenchment was the watchword of his early days as Secretary of State. He quickly had reversed many of the policies of Blaine's aggressive diplomacy, and it would have seemed logical for him to try to keep the United States from participating in this international agreement. But to the relief of Red Cross supporters, he continued Blaine's policy in this instance, regardless of what his personal desires may have been.

As a rsult, the Convention was sent to the Senate early in March, 1882, referred to the Foreign Relations Committee for consideration, and then presented to the Senate as a whole for ratification. Finally on March 16th the Convention was at last ratified, thus ending an eighteen-year, uphill struggle by its supporters in this country and abroad. Not only had the United States ratified the Convention of 1864, but it was the first to ratify the Additional Articles of 1868, adapting the rules of land warfare to the Navy. The exchange of ratification quickly took place, and the treaty binding the United States to the Geneva Convention was proclaimed formally on July 26, 1882. Because no other nation had yet ratified the Additional Articles, the United States did not formally commit herself to abide by these when the treaty was proclaimed.<sup>39</sup>

At last the American Association of the Red Cross was on a firm foundation, and congratulations poured in from all quarters. President Moynier presented Clara Barton a medal in honor of her untiring struggle for ratification.<sup>40</sup> The International Red Cross immediately notified the other member nations, and although they could not explain "... so complete a reversal of opinion ...," they were nevertheless overjoyed with the change in sentiment of

the great Transatlantic Republic.41

Since 1882 the American Red Cross has grown and expanded and has generously helped alleviate suffering at home and on distant shores. Through succeeding international conferences its scope has been broadened and its duties have been more exactly defined in order to do a more effective job. Immediately it was called into action in the Balkan War of 1883. Again it was present at the Johns-

town flood of 1889 and at the Russian famine of 1891.42 The veterans of America's four major conflicts since ratification have ample cause to respect and be thankful for this organization.

The decision of the United States to adhere to this Convention brought into sharp contrast two conflcting and well meaning policies. The first was the traditional, time-honored belief, cherished by Americans, that the Atlantic ocean should be a political as well as a physical barrier to embroilment in European diplomacy. The second was the humane principle of improving the lot of the unfortunate, wounded soldier. The abandonment of the first to secure the second was part of an infant, unheralded trend toward a more aggressive participation in world politics and was accompanied hand in hand with the tremendous internal growth and productive capacity of the United States.

capacity of the United States.

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6 Charles S. P. Bowles, Report to the Executive Committee of the European Branch of the United States Sanitary Commission, Paris, September 15, 1864, typescript copy, National Archives, Washington, 2-5.

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8 Ibid., 5-6.

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12 Moynier to Hayes, August 19, 1877, in Barton, Red Cross, 36.

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15 Geneva Convention of 1864, in Barton, Red Cross, 58.

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19 Harrington to Seward, May 23, 1866, No. 9, Foreign Relations, Part II, 184-185.

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27 Red Cross, The Geneva Conference of 1868, National Archives, Washington.
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29 Watson to Fish, July 24, 1874, No. 353, Foreign Relations, 564.
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30 Proclamation by Arthur, July 26, 1882, in Barton, Red Cross, 86.

40 Moynier to Barton, March 24, 1882, in Barton, Red Cross, 82.

41 International Bulletin for April, 1882, in Barton, Red Cross, 87.

42 Barton, Red Cross, 94ff.