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THE CENTENARY OF THE JAPANESE
RED CROSS SOCIETY¹

Japan lived until recently in isolation. It was during the Meiji Restoration, as from 1868, that the country opened itself to the outside world.

In 1877, Japan had its last civil war, which took place in Kyushu, the southernmost island. Tawarazaka, in the present Kumamoto Prefecture, was the Solferino of Japan, and Count Tsunetami Sano was our Henry Dunant. Count Sano, a member of the Senate, who visited Europe in 1865 and 1867, introduced the Red Cross into Japan.

The battlefield at Tawarazaka reminded him of the Red Cross activities he had observed in Europe and he lost no time in asking the government for permission to organize a society which would care for the sick and wounded on both sides alike. He made a direct appeal to Prince Taruhito Arisugawa, Commander of the Imperial Forces, who was at the front. The prince had been deeply impressed by the harsh realities of the battlefield and immediately granted Count Sano the necessary authorization. It was the 1st May 1877, and this date is regarded as the birthday of the Japanese Red Cross Society.

Count Sano organized the Hakuaisha or Philanthropic Society at once and began to take care of the sick and wounded on the battlefield.

It is interesting to note that when the medical units of the Japanese Army first wanted to use the Red Cross emblem, eminent leaders of the government opposed the idea, arguing that Japan was not a Christian country. So the army removed the vertical bar of the red cross and adop-

¹ *Plate.*

ted a wide red horizontal line for its emblem. When the Hakuaisha was organized, Count Sano took as its emblem the wide red horizontal line with a red rising sun above it.¹

On 15 November 1886, the Japanese Government ratified the Geneva Convention and the Hakuaisha changed its name to Japanese Red Cross Society on 20 May 1887. The Society began using the red cross emblem and this time there was no opposition to its use. The leaders of the government and the general public understood the real meaning of the red cross which had nothing to do with any kind of religious idea.²

In the following year, Mount Bandai in Fukushima Prefecture erupted, causing a great many casualties. At that time, although the Japanese Red Cross Society had been organized for the purpose of caring for sick and wounded soldiers, the Society, by special order of Empress Shoken, conducted the first peacetime relief service in its history. It is remarkable that Empress Shoken realized the importance of Red Cross peacetime services thirty years before the organization of the League of Red Cross Societies.

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At first, in conformity with the Geneva Convention, the Society wished to train medical personnel or nurses. Since it was imperative to have a hospital for the training of nurses, Count Sano established the Hakuaisha Hospital in November 1886; the following year it became the Japanese Red Cross Hospital. The actual training of nurses, however, did not begin until 1890.

This hospital has now grown to be the present Japanese Red Cross Medical Center in Tokyo, one of the most modern hospitals in Japan, with a 1,000-bed capacity. In addition, the Society now has 91 general hospitals, three maternity hospitals, two atomic disease hospitals and nine medical clinics with a total of 34,000 beds.

Today the Society operates two Junior Women's Colleges of Nursing, 38 Practical Colleges of Nursing and two Schools of Midwifery. Over one thousand nurses graduate from these colleges and schools every year. When the Florence Nightingale Medal was created and the first presentation made in 1920, three Japanese Red Cross nurses were honored with this award; to date 59 Japanese nurses have been so honored.

¹ See *International Review of the Red Cross*, June 1977, article entitled "The Emblem of the Red Cross", 3rd part. (Ed.)

² The literal translation of "Red Cross Society" in Japanese is "Society of the red character 10". (Ed.)

The emphasis on medical activity is one of the characteristics of the Japanese Red Cross. Out of its present 29,358 career staff members, more than half are medical personnel.

These medical personnel can be organized into four hundred and forty-five medical relief teams, each consisting of one doctor, one head nurse, two nurses, one clerk and one technician, and they can be dispatched to the scenes of disaster whenever they are needed. They can even be flown, together with medicines, relief goods, blood, etc., by the Japanese Red Cross Flying Corps, composed of volunteer amateur pilots.

During the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), Red Cross medical relief teams were dispatched to the front and during World War I such teams served even in France, Great Britain and Russia. In those days the Society had two hospital ships, the Hakuai Maru and the Kosai Maru.

When the second Sino-Japanese War started in July 1937, the Society sent 150 medical relief teams abroad and during World War II it dispatched 960 medical relief teams. During that war, the Red Cross message and tracing services were very active throughout the war and over 1,000,000 cases were handled.

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On the occasion of the Ninth International Red Cross Conference held in Washington in April 1912, Empress Shoken made a contribution of 100,000 yen to the International Red Cross. The Japanese Red Cross has been exerting itself to increase the capital of this fund, which at present amounts to more than 2.5 million Swiss francs. Interest from the Fund, about 1.5 million Swiss francs so far, has been distributed year after year to 277 Red Cross Societies, for the development of their peacetime services.

The League of Red Cross Societies was founded on 5 May 1919, and the Japanese Red Cross Society was one of the five Societies which, in the following months, organized the new international Red Cross body.

In 1922 the Junior Red Cross was born at a primary school in Shiga Prefecture near Kyoto; at present there are more than one million members. In 1970, the Technical Seminar for Red Cross Youth in the Southeast Asian and Pacific Regions, called "Konnichiwa '70", was held in Japan.

The Society celebrated the 50th anniversary of its foundation in 1926, and that year the Second Oriental Red Cross Regional Conference took

place in Tokyo. In 1934, the fifteenth International Red Cross Conference was also held in Tokyo with 319 delegates attending from 54 countries.

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When the Pacific War finally came to an end in 1945, the Japanese Red Cross Society had spent almost all its funds and most of its chapters and hospital buildings had been destroyed. With the end of the war, the Society decided to change its programs to meet peacetime needs. In order to reorganize the Society, its Charter was drastically revised in 1947 and the new Japanese Red Cross Society Law became effective in 1952. Thanks to the great assistance and support of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and many sister Societies, the Japanese Red Cross was able to reorganize itself much more quickly than was anticipated.

The repatriation of a great number of Japanese nationals from those countries with which the Japanese Government had no diplomatic relations (such as China, the USSR, etc.) was made possible through the close friendly cooperation and assistance of the sister Societies of those countries.

Volunteer Services, First Aid, Water Safety and Home Nursing were reorganized or newly introduced soon after the end of the war. Today all these services are greatly appreciated by the Japanese people.

It was in April 1952 that the Blood Program was started with the generous assistance of the American National Red Cross. At present over 99 percent of the blood used in this country is collected through the Society from volunteer donors only. Production of blood derivatives has started also.

The Society sent a medical relief team to the Congo in 1960; to Nigeria in 1970; to Bangladesh in 1972 and to Laos in 1973-74.

From 1959 to 1968, the Japanese Red Cross, in cooperation with the Red Cross Society of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and under the auspices of the ICRC, repatriated from Japan to North Korea about 90,000 Koreans who had been living in Japan since the Second World War and had been unable to go back to their home country owing to the absence of all relations between the two States.

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This year, 1977, the Society is celebrating the centenary of its foundation. It now counts more than 12 million adult members and, as already said above, more than one million Junior Red Cross members.

Besides the head office in Tokyo, there is a local branch (or chapter) of the Society in each of the 47 prefectures of Japan.

An exhibition was opened in October 1976 at Kumamoto where, as noted above, the Society was born. This exhibition is scheduled to travel to 25 main cities until November of this year.

The Centenary Celebration is to be held in Tokyo on 26 May in the presence of Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan. The Japanese Red Cross has always enjoyed the protection of the Imperial Family, and H.M. the Empress is the Honorary President of the Society. Every year, she presides over several Red Cross functions, in particular the Florence Nightingale Medal presentation ceremony.

After the official celebration, a large parade composed of Junior Red Cross members, student nurses, youth and adult volunteers, Red Cross visitors from abroad, etc., is planned for Sunday, 29 May, and will march through the Ginza Street in Tokyo. In the sky, small planes from the Flying Corps will fly past during the parade.

A book entitled "History of the Hundred Years of the Japanese Red Cross Society" will be published, a medal has been stamped, a record with music specially composed for the occasion is being put on sale; the new building of the Society head office in Tokyo will be inaugurated. The Japanese Red Cross Society is starting on the second century of its history, grateful for the support and assistance it has received in the past from millions of people, and hopeful that this solidarity and cooperation will not fail it in the future.¹

¹ Article based on a text received from the Japanese Red Cross Society.