

The History Of The Red Cross

PRIVATE WARREN had learned to enjoy the interesting talks with which his good friend Lieutenant O'Connor had frequently treated him during the leisure hours which they spent together at a Base Hospital in France. And so when, seated under a tree one afternoon, the officer proposed to tell his friend something of the origin and history of the Red Cross, Warren stretched himself on the grass and listened eagerly.

"You may not be aware," began the Lieutenant, "that the little Red Cross worn by our nurses has a history as old as Christianity itself. Not always was it identified solely with nursing, although in more recent times, it has possessed but that significance. Perhaps you have read of the inestimable value attached to the work done by the wearers of the Red Cross during the Franco-Prussian war of over forty-five years ago; when, on these very grounds where we are now fighting, soldiers of both France and Germany were tenderly cared for by the zealous devotees of this emblem. So much was the necessity for such a unit felt, during those years, that sixteen millions of dollars, were spent in its maintenance. The Sisters of Charity assisted by other religious orders were especially prominent in the good work at that time. This was the second great conflict in which the Red Cross as a distinctive society took an active part. When Italy, Austria and Germany were in the throes of battle in 1866, this nursing society appeared for the first time under the protection of the warring nations. Some two or three years previous to the outbreak of that war, the Red Cross was recognized as an international institution, by the representatives of the various governments, then assembled at Geneva in Switzerland. The Swiss flag as you know bears a red cross and to this the origin of our nurse's emblem is often attributed; but, as I shall show you later it was known much earlier than this, and had its beginning in a far more sacred source. The store of the Crimean War furnishes us with a splendid example of the incalculable good performed by heroic women on the field of

battle. It was then that the great Florence Nightingale, with her corps of assistants, many of whom were Sisters of Charity established that reputation which it is the desire of every nurse to emulate. Moreover, and this may not be generally known, it was at the hospital of the Sisters of Charity that Miss Nightingale received the greater part of her training. Throughout her whole life she admired and loved the holy women of that order. And I would like to impress upon you, that to the Catholic Church is due great credit for having fostered and encouraged those nursing societies which later grew into our modern "Red Cross." It was St. Vincent de Paul who founded the society of "Grey Sisters" with the aim of lessening the suffering caused by the Thirty Years War, and it was in the Polish Wars that these "Angels of the Battlefield" first appeared as relievers of the wounded. Thus you see that "Somewhere in France" Sisters of Charity almost three centuries ago, as to-day, carried comfort—both bodily and spiritual—to the afflicted. But I promised to tell you where the Little Red Cross really originated. Well, in the eleventh century the first expedition from Western Europe was made into the country of Palestine that those regions might be opened to pilgrims desiring to visit the scenes made sacred by the feet of the Redeemer. This and similar expeditions which followed later were called Crusades from the fact that on their uniforms the soldiers wore a Red Cross. It was a fitting emblem. For they were in the services of Him whose blood stained Red the Cross on the rugged heights of Calvary."

As they rose to go into the Hospital, Private Warren remarked ; "While I could not but admire the immensity of this wonderful organization at the present time both here and in 'Blighty,' I little dreamed that it had such an interesting history."

A. A. O'B. '19.

Charm strikes the sight, but merit wins the soul.