

The Empress Maria Feodorovna Fund

At the time when the Red Cross movement is preparing to celebrate the Centenary of its foundation, it seems a good moment to remember those who have contributed to its development in every country and who, by their initiative, have enlarged the field of its action.

In September 1961, the International Review printed an article on the Augusta Fund, created in 1890 by the ICRC, in memory of the Empress of Germany, thus beginning the series of articles intended to recall the outstanding personalities who, within the Red Cross, took it upon themselves to uphold a great cause.

The following article is part of this series of studies which will continue with an article on the Empress Shōken, who in 1912 created the Fund which bears her name.

The Maria Feodorovna Fund functioned twice, in London in 1907 and in Washington in 1912. It served a useful purpose, which is why we are happy to publish this article, written by a member of the staff of the ICRC, MRS. MARTHE ICONOMOW, author of this series of historical studies. (Editor's Note.)

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I. EMPRESS MARIA FEODOROVNA

The future Empress of Russia was born in Copenhagen in September 1847 and was named Sophia-Frederica Dagmar, by her parents, the King and Queen of Denmark. Her childhood was a simple and happy one and she grew into a charming young girl whom, by common consent, the Russian and Danish sovereigns intended for the Czarevitch. However, the latter had previously fallen in love with a young Russian girl and lacked both the strength to break this liaison and the courage to abide by the law in force which made it his duty to marry a princess of the blood royal or of royal descent. Faced with this cruel dilemma, his reason gave way and he sought oblivion in the South of France, where he died.

This tragic episode had a profound effect on his unfortunate fiancée, but its outcome was as happy as it was unexpected. Alexander, called upon to succeed his brother, fell in love with the Princess and asked for her hand.

Following her engagement, which was celebrated in Copenhagen in June 1866, the Princess began the long period of preparation and studies which her future duties necessitated. She embraced the Orthodox religion and took the name of Maria Feodorovna.

Three months later, she stood on the deck of the *Schleswig* with her brother, the Crown Prince, whilst the Russian fleet with the Czar, her fiancé and the other members of the imperial family took up position ahead of the Danish yacht to welcome it into Kronstadt roadstead. The young couple were married at Saint-Petersburg on October 28, 1866, and made their entry into Moscow in the spring of 1868.

From then on, Maria Feodorovna took an interest in everything concerning Russia, in its history, its art and its literature and it was not long before she was completely captivated by her new country. She was already stirred by the misfortune around her and sought to remedy it. After the events of 1881, which resulted in her husband becoming Emperor, Maria Feodorovna had more freedom to devote herself whole-heartedly to her humanitarian work. Needs were great and in order to meet them effectively, she set up what could almost be described as a "Ministry of social

institutions". Her days were frequently spent in visiting the schools and institutions under her patronage, and she carried out her many activities with an innate kindness, tact and simplicity. Any misfortune had her instant attention. The Court chronicle tells how "one day she entered Alexander III's office. Amongst the documents awaiting his signature, she saw one which carried the following note in the margin "Mercy impossible; send to Siberia". Maria Feodorovna took a pen and moved the semi-colon, so that the note read "Mercy; impossible send to Siberia". This subterfuge did not fool Alexander, but he was so touched by his wife's gesture that he ratified her verdict".

This charitable network soon extended to the point where expert administration was needed, and the Empress called for Count Protasoff-Bakhmetieff, aide-de-camp and former Commanding Officer of the Imperial Horse-Guards. This outstanding man's kindness and integrity were so well known to the Empress that she chose him from a thousand names, and he carried out his important duties conscientiously and with exemplary efficiency.

On October 28, 1891, the royal couple celebrated their silver wedding. Three years later, however, Alexander III died following a long illness, during which his wife never left his bedside, despite the risk of infection; she then abdicated all power in favour of her son, and devoted herself entirely to the charitable institutions which she had created and developed.

Amongst these was one for which she had particular affection, the Russian Red Cross, of which she was Patron. The foundation of the Society was followed by nineteen conflicts culminating in the First World War, and on each occasion, the Society distinguished itself in the various fields which presented themselves for its charitable work.

But, it was not only in Russia that the Empress Maria Feodorovna closely followed the development of the Red Cross movement. Witness her gesture to Henry Dunant, whose friend, Professor Rudolf Müller, had remained faithful to him over the difficult years.

Müller, in fact, had worked with much devotion and tact to arouse the interest of the world in Dunant's work. It was due to

him that a foundation had been set up in Stuttgart, under the chairmanship of the town's mayor, Mr. Ruemelin. In addition to this, he had written an historical work on the Red Cross and the drafting of the legal texts of the Geneva Conventions of 1864 in which he stressed the part played by Henry Dunant.

This book appeared in 1897 and came to the notice of the Empress of Russia, who immediately allocated a pension of four thousand Swiss francs to Dunant. In the same year, there was an international medical congress in Moscow and the doctors gathered together from numerous countries were quick to follow this fine gesture. They awarded their prize of honour of five thousand francs to the author of *A Memory of Solferino*. Thus freed from his more immediate material worries, Dunant could contemplate the future somewhat more calmly, rejoice in the fulfilment of his work, recall in his "memoirs" what had already been translated into action and outline other proposals, the aim of every one of which was towards better understanding between peoples and a rapprochement between the different races and social classes.

During the First World War, the Red Cross developed considerably. The Russian Red Cross was no exception and gave help both inside and outside the vast Russian Empire. When the revolution broke out, Maria Feodorovna left for England, where she was welcomed by her sister Queen Alexandra. Later, the desire grew in her for solitude and independence and there could be no better place to find them than in her childhood home in Denmark. It was in that haven of peace that she died on October 13, 1928.

II. THE EMPRESS MARIA FEODOROVNA FUND

Let us now return to the beginning of the century and the International Red Cross Conference which was held at Saint-Petersburg from May 16 to 22, 1902. The Patron of the Russian Red Cross was present at the inaugural session and she asked the Chairman to address a warm welcome to the delegates gathered together from all over the world.

The agenda was extremely crowded and included some important points, notably the application of the principles of the Geneva Convention to maritime warfare, the position of prisoners of war, international relief, the activity of National Red Cross Societies in time of peace and finally, the establishment of a set of rules for future international conferences.

The Central Committee of the Russian Red Cross had attached particular importance to the exhibition which opened as part of the conference, and the Empress supported this initiative by creating an inalienable fund of one hundred thousand roubles, the annual interest on which was to be used to award important prizes at each international conference, to the authors of the best inventions having as their aim the lessening of the suffering of sick and wounded troops. Draft statutes comprising ten articles were submitted to the assembly and a jury was to be appointed. It was to consist of eight members, two of whom were to be elected by right, one by the Russian Central Committee and the other by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The first prizes were to be awarded during the exhibition which was to be organised for the International Conference of 1907.

Speaking for the Empress, the Chairman said : " The memory of the Greco-Turkish, Chinese and South African wars is still too vivid not to preoccupy responsible circles. The fate of combatants exposed to the murderous effect of increasingly improved weapons of destruction was naturally a subject of anxiety to all nations, but above all to the official Health Services and their auxiliaries of the Red Cross " . . . It was the latter's duty to be particularly vigilant, so as to be in a position to fulfil its rôle on behalf of the sick and wounded on land and sea. It must be ready at any time to give them first aid and facilitate their evacuation whilst avoiding suffering as much as possible.

The Prussian Government's delegate stressed that " . . . The Empress Maria Feodorovna's gift will allow a great step forward to be taken in this field. It will be an incitement both to inventors and to manufacturers. We know by experience moreover the example and encouragement which our Sovereigns give to the Red Cross . . . ". He was of course thinking of the prolific work of the German Empress, Augusta.

Among the ten articles of the proposed statutes, the third clearly defines the intended aim : " The prizes will be awarded for inventions having as their aim the search for and collection of wounded on the battle-field on land and sea . . . the most rapid and least painful means of transporting the wounded to the nearest medical aid posts, and then their final evacuation ". It was estimated that the interest of the Fund which would accumulate from one international conference to another would allow a sum of about 20,000 roubles to be used for the prizes.

Gustave Ador, who was then Vice-President of the International Committee, did not confine himself to presiding over the special commission which had been detailed to establish the final text of the statutes, he took an active part in the proceedings and proposed numerous alterations to the original provisions. He encouraged the National Committees to make sure of the co-operation of technical organs, such as specialized papers and military and medical reviews, to make known the basis of the competition and its generous aim.

It was for the Assembly to designate the six committees detailed to nominate one member each and the committees of Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and the Netherlands were chosen.

The statutes, duly amended, were then finally adopted by the Conference at the plenary session of May 21, 1902.

On the Saturday preceding this meeting, the Empress Maria Feodorovna gave a reception for the delegates. She received them at the Palace of Gatchina, and they then returned to Saint-Petersburg, where they visited the imperial institute of experimental medicine, escorted by the famous Professor Pavlov.

This VIIth International Conference was one of the most fruitful for the work of the Red Cross, because problems of major interest were examined and resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned. But it fell to the VIIIth International Conference to ratify the decisions taken. This opened in London, on June 11, 1907, and the Assembly heard the President read a message of welcome from Queen Alexandra whose sister, Maria Feodorovna, also sent her best wishes for the success of the Conference.

The International Committee of the Red Cross had previously sent the National Societies its 116th circular of November 30, 1906,

giving them the necessary information on the Competition and the proposed Exhibition which was to be organised by the Central Committee of the British Red Cross.

The International Jury was composed of the following: de Martens, President, Zoëge von Manteuffel (Russian Committee), Dr. Ferrière (ICRC), Dr. Pannwitz (Germany), Prince Hugo von Dietrichstein (Austria), Dr. Lortat-Jakob (France), Sir Frederick Treves (Great Britain), Count Gian Giacomo Della Somaglia (Italy) and Baron van Hardenbroek van Bergambacht (Netherlands). As the President of the Jury was subsequently called upon to chair the Second Conference of the Hague, he was replaced by Manteuffel, representative of the Russian Committee.

In conformity with articles 2 and 9 of the statutes, three prizes were awarded "to those who presented in all or in part, the best solution to the problem of bringing help to the wounded, the most sure and most rapid means of searching for and collecting the wounded on the battle-field on land and sea, the best types of stretchers and vehicles for transporting the wounded to the bandaging posts, as quickly as possible and with as little suffering as possible for the wounded, or the means of rescue at sea, the best installations in ambulances, wagons and on board ship etc. for final evacuation".

The interest on the inalienable Fund of one hundred thousand roubles now stood at 20,722 roubles. The expenses for organising the Exhibition at Prince's Hall, Earl's Court came to £500. The Executive Committee of the British Red Cross assumed half of this, and the Executive Committee of the Empress Maria Feodorovna Fund was asked to be responsible for the other half. The International Jury therefore had about 18,400 roubles at its disposal.

Out of the 200 inventions exhibited, only 150 were shown to the Jury because, according to the statutes, individual entries only were eligible for prizes. The rapporteur, Dr. Ferrière, proposed to the Assembly that diplomas of honour should be awarded to outstanding collective contributions and this was agreed to.

The first prize of 6,000 roubles was shared between General Melan (Russia)—for a Finnish cart equipped with stretcher, a construction both solid and light, which had proved itself during

the war in Manchuria, and Colonel Hathaway (England)—for his "Tonga" ambulance wagon equipped with tents for installing first aid posts, an invention which had rendered outstanding services in the East Indies.

The second prize, of the same amount, was shared between Dr. Auffret (France)—for his stretcher called "The Auffret cradle", used for transporting the wounded on board ship, and Mr. Linxweiler (Germany)—for his different systems of elastic suspension for stretchers in railway carriages and on wagons.

The third prize, also of 6,000 roubles, was shared between Mr. Christophe and Mr. Munack (Germany)—for their portable hut and Dr. Boland (Netherlands)—for equipping a first aid transport post on bicycles.

The Jury awarded honourable mentions to several inventors to whom it wished to show its approval. It also submitted a certain number of proposals to the Assembly with a view to making the competition still more vivid and effective. As a matter of courtesy, these were submitted to the dowager Empress, Maria Feodorovna.

During the interval separating the two International Red Cross Conferences, the Russo-Japanese war had broken out. Under its patron, the Russian Central Committee rapidly organised itself to deal with the heavy tasks awaiting it at the front. Count Voronzov-Dachkov was asked to preside over an executive committee, composed of 7 members, and the Central Committee directed all the humanitarian activities in the war theatre. The co-operation of volunteers was asked for and co-ordination was handled by a special Red Cross committee, presided over by the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna.

All sections of the population were united in the same impulse of generosity, and two months after the outbreak of hostilities, ten hospitals were already fully active as well as ten mobile detachments, six staging ambulances, eight mobile teams for disinfection and two hospital trains. As early as February 28, 1904, the vessel *Mongolia* was in the operational area with equipment and personnel chosen by the Russian Red Cross. Numerous regional committees looked after the sick and wounded evacuated from the front and they were assured of the authorities' support. To complete the

work of the Red Cross, an information bureau was set up regarding prisoners of war nursed in the ambulances.

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To return to the Maria Feodorovna Fund, the conclusions of the London Conference were summarized in the form of permanent statutes by the Russian Central Committee and communicated to the National Societies in December 1910. In spite of the technical difficulties, a separate part of the exhibition Pavilion, erected near the Pan-American Union Palace in Washington, where the IXth International Red Cross Conference was to be held in 1912, was set aside for entries to the competition.

The Fund Commission adopted broader statutes: article 7 stipulated that only new inventions, details of which had not been published previously, would be eligible. The International Jury suggested still further improvements, notably that preference would be given to inventions whose practical utility had already been demonstrated.

The Washington Assembly was unanimous in accepting the new draft which took into consideration the suggestions put forward and to which the Empress Maria Feodorovna gave her consent. The double exhibition for the Red Cross and for the competition was a great success and its general arrangement was much admired by participants and public alike.

18,000 roubles were available for the 9 prizes awarded and 153 entries from fourteen countries arrived in Washington. Dr. Louis Lesage, Head of the electrotherapy and radiotherapy laboratory at the Necker Hospital in Paris, was awarded the first prize for his mobile radiology laboratory. Two second prizes were awarded, one to Mr. Steindorf (Germany)—for adapting a bicycle into a stretcher on improvised wheels and one to Major Riggerbach (Switzerland)—for his folding stretcher on wheels adaptable to different means of transport. Six third prizes, each of one thousand roubles, went to Captain Henry L. Brown, of the Medical Corps (U.S.A.)—for a portable wash stand, transportable by mule; to Mr. Linxweiler (Germany)—for different combinations of folding

stretchers ; to Dr. Glinsky (Russia)—for a folding stretcher ; to Major Halloran, of the Medical Corps (U.S.A.), also for a folding stretcher, and finally to Captain Rosselli and his colleagues and to Lieutenant Taschetti and Colonel Abbamondi (Italy)—for their two models of frames for transporting the wounded which were adapted for the Italian Navy. Finally, the Jury once again awarded a certain number of honourable mentions and diplomas of honour to the National Red Cross Societies and to those who had co-operated so successfully to make this competition a success.

A telegram of thanks was sent to the Empress Maria Feodorovna ; it was also a message of sympathy because she had just lost her father, King Christian IX of Denmark. From London, where she was staying with her sister Queen Alexandra, she sent the following reply :

Mr. Gustave Ador, Chairman Ninth Red Cross Conference, Washington. I was extremely interested to see the list of prizes awarded by the International Jury of the IXth Red Cross Conference from the fund in my name, and I thank you for your telegram. I was deeply touched by your words of sympathy on the loss which I have just suffered and I send you my heartfelt thanks (s) Maria Feodorovna.

In Washington, the IXth International Conference had the satisfaction of hearing of a new gift. This time from an Asian Empress, the Japanese sovereign, who wanted to devote a considerable sum to the work of the Red Cross. This sum was to be used to set up the Shôken Fund. The other important subjects on the agenda were the creation of a Florence Nightingale medal, the legal protection of the rights and privileges of the Red Cross, the suppression of abuses of the emblem, assistance to prisoners of war and troops in time of peace and a wider circulation of the *Bulletin* published by the International Committee. On another subject, a special commission was given the task of looking into the important question of the functions of the Red Cross in the event of civil war.

This was the longest International Conference. It opened on May 6, 1912 and did not finish its work until May 17. It was presided over by Gustave Ador—also President of the ICRC—who by

THE EMPRESS MARIA FEODOROVNA FUND

reason of his high offices, was asked to say a few words at Mount Vernon, in memory of George Washington. On the last evening, three thousand people were invited to the White House by the United States' President and Mrs. Taft.

What a contrast between these celebrations and the events which, two years later, plunged the world into bloodshed. During this war, the inventions entered for the competition for the Empress Maria Feodorovna prize were to demonstrate over and over again their utility in the work of relief of suffering. Thus, although the Empress Maria Feodorovna Fund disappeared in the holocaust which, in Russia, followed the First World War, it did serve a definite purpose. The woman who created it is worthy of a place in Red Cross history, side by side with sovereigns such as the Empress Augusta and the Empress Shôken, who gave their attention to human suffering and the means of remedying it.