

# A memory of Solferino (“Un souvenir de Solferino”) in Italy. The role of a book on the origin of Italian Red Cross Society

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**Abstract.** In this article the authors describe the role that the book “Un Souvenir de Solferino” had in Italy for the foundation of the first Italian Red Cross Committees starting from the one in Milan.

**Key words:** Italian Red Cross, Solferino, Henry Dunant, Red Cross history.

## An important history between Red Cross and Medicine

The Red Cross history is part of the history of medicine, as we sustained in some of our previous works(1, 2). Certainly the Italian Red Cross was born from the ideal inspiration coming from the pages of “Un Souvenir de Solferino”(3) by Henry Dunant (the 1862<sup>nd</sup> edition) after he assisted to the tragedy of the wounded soldiers in Castiglione delle Stiviere.

At that time the conditions were very favorable to humanitarian, fraternal and particularly innovative ideas; and these were universally connected to the birth of the Red Cross.

Even in Italy, as elsewhere, these ideas, as seen in the light of nascent patriotism, are believed to be the origin of the renewal for military health service.

The horror of the war described by Dunant in the “Un Souvenir” and later in his “Memories” (4), generated patriotic yearning and humanitarian impulse towards the suffering; this will also contribute strongly to the unification process of Italy.

This parallelism is acceptable in relation to the historical and political situation of Italy.

The cry for freedom is well connected to civilization and progress, a progress that begins as soon as the conditions of barbarity are won by an ideal and human world, in which the wolf and the lamb will live together in a fraternal and friendly atmosphere realized by a superior justice.

Here we find the real antagonism: the barbarity and the servitude versus the liberation, the goodness and the exaltation of the gifts that man received from God.

This explains the triumph of the idea of Red Cross in Italy, and the reason why the souls of patriots and good-will men were inflamed by it.

This is true for Red Cross origins, but a change occurred between 1882 and 1884, in which the Italian Red Cross became a state institution. This involves the principle of its independence. Thus, it became an auxiliary service of the armed forces, in aid of Military Health Service.

What happened in Italy in that dramatic June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1859 -date that inspired the publication of “Un Souvenir di Solferino”- began with a question mark about the real date of arrival of Henry Dunant in Castiglione delle Stiviere.

Did he arrive in Castiglione on the evening of 24<sup>th</sup> or the morning 25<sup>th</sup> of June, as stated in his correspondence with George Baumberger? And did he stay in Palazzo Bondoni Pastorio or in another hotel of the city, as we can read in one of his letters to Rudolph Müller (5)?

We agree with Roger Durand that Dunant's famous *short* book should have been entitled "A Souvenir of Castiglione delle Stiviere", because it is in that place that Henry Dunant was inspired by the creation of the Red Cross, facing of human suffering; so it is the name of Castiglione that should enter the indelible memory of the history.

From June 25<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> Don Lorenzo Barziza, a priest from Castiglione, distinguished himself for his work of humanitarian aid by organizing 12 temporary hospitals.

For this undertaking he receives the *Légion d'Honneur* from Napoleon III: it is strange and mysterious that Henry Dunant will never speak of Lorenzo Barziza, even if they were both in Castiglione in those days!

At the beginning of the writing of Italian Red Cross history (5), the discussion focused on one of Henry Dunant's Italian precursor: Ferdinando Palasciano. It is true that the medical-scientific neutrality of Palasciano is not that of the heart and piety of Dunant.

Despite everything, we are aware that we cannot write the history of the International and Italian Red Cross without mentioning the work of the great surgeon from Capua, Ferdinando Palasciano, who is closely linked to that of the surgeon from Geneva (but originally from Piedmont), Louis Appia.

Between January 1861 and January 1862, several meetings were held at the Pontaniana Academy in Naples in which Ferdinando Palasciano spread his ideas on neutrality.

He also financed a race on the publication of 100 aphorisms for military surgery, and the award was assigned in part to Dr. De Vita and in part to the Dr. Appia. These aphorisms were published in the Manual of Military Surgery by Ferdinando Palasciano (6) (Fig. 1).

In November 1862 the first edition of "Un Souvenir de Solferino" was published. In spite of all, in our opinion this little book is a sort of Gospel for the Red Cross volunteers. In those pages there are all the prophetic values of international lay humanitarianism,

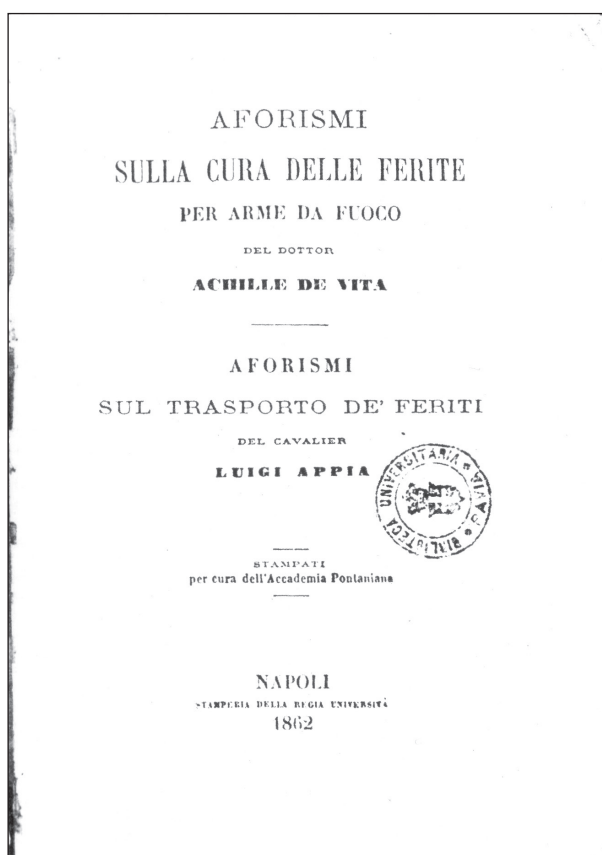


Fig. 1 Manual of Military Surgery funded by Ferdinando Palasciano

and there is the past, the present and the future of the Red Cross.

In November 1863, in Milan, Luigi Zanetti translated "Un Souvenir de Solferino". This edition has been forgotten in the chronology of the various translations quoted in the historical "Centennial Edition" on the anniversary of the birth of Dunant, in 1928. Giorgio Ceci, a Red Cross volunteer, has rediscovered the Zanetti edition that we reprinted in 2009 (7).

In January 1864, Dr. Cesare Castiglioni, distinguished patriot of Milan, student and scientist, as well as president of the Italian Medical Association of Milan, set up a commission for the creation of an "Aid Society to the wounded and sick soldiers in wartime" (that later became the Red Cross), according to the principles of the Geneva Constitutive Conference (October 1863).

The Milanese commission invited the 50 sections of the Italian Medical Association to follow its exam-

ple. No doubt that the Red Cross in Italy began essentially thanks to doctors.

In January 1864, Guido Corsini (8) also tried to create an “Association for the rescue of wounded soldiers” in Florence, but he did not have the same success as Castiglioni. He succeeded in setting up only a first provisional committee in 1865. Henry Dunant cites him in one of his many publications, “International charity on the battlefield”(9), released in the same year.

June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1864 is the official day of birth of the Milan Committee of the “Italian Medical Association for the relief of the wounded and sick in wartime”: the Italian Red Cross was born! King Vittorio Emanuele II, who was its patron, recognized the association, and Prince Umberto was elected its honorary president. Article 1 of the statute proclaimed: “The objective is to save the wounded and sick soldiers in wartime, and to assist with all means the army health service in wartime”. We also mention article 14: “In times of peace, we must prepare for war”.

A short chronology:

### **November 1863, Milan**

First Italian translation of “Un Souvenir by Solferino” by Luigi Zanetti, published a few months after the third edition of Henry Dunant (February 1863), who gave his authorization to Zanetti.

### **December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1863**

Ferdinando Palasciano read at the Pontaniana Academy his third memory on the neutrality of wounded soldiers, in which he claimed his pioneering position with the “Manual of Military Surgery” (authors Achille De Vita and Louis Appia) that perhaps aided Appia to be invited to Geneva to be part of the “Committee of the Five” (4)

### **January 1864**

Dr. Cesare Castiglioni, President of the Milan Italian Medical Association, established a commission

for the creation of a “Society for the rescue of wounded and sick soldiers at war”, according to the suggestions made by the Geneva Constitutive Conference of October 26<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, 1863. The Milan Committee invited fifty of the Italian medical association’s headquarters to follow his example.

### **January 1864**

Guido Corsini’s patriotic invitation to Florence for the constitution of the same association for the relief of wounded soldiers. See “International charity on the battlefields”.

The neutrality of the wounded soldiers in wartime had already been supported by Ferdinando Palasciano in the siege of Messina in 1848 (communication of his widow Countess Olga of Wavilow) (10) and then in Pontanian Academy of Naples. However, in two authoritative medical history texts, Arturo Castiglioni and Adalberto Pazzini indicated Sir John Pringle (1707-1782), author of “Diseases of Armies”, published in 1810, as the “inventor” of the Red Cross.

Similarly, the French pharmacist Henri Arrault wrote to Napoleon III and claimed the birthright of the idea of the Red Cross. George Sand took his defense and spoke of the war between the two “Henri / Henry”, Arrault and Dunant.

Really, the cruelty of war and the advent of modern weapons, combined with the uselessness of an inexorable death due to the lack of care, had already been known for a long time.

We also recall that at the Statistical Congress in Berlin in September 1863, Dunant’s friend, Dr. Basting (4) aroused the applause of the military doctors talking about neutrality for the injured soldiers, as well as the structures and the people who assist them.

Henry Dunant distinguished himself on this from the ideas of Palasciano, but not from those of Arrault.

### **August 8<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1864**

The Geneva Diplomatic Conference adopted the Convention to improve the conditions of soldiers “injured on the battlefield”.

The king of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele II, was officially represented in that conference by the Italian consul in Geneva Giovanni Cappello and the division physician Felice Baroffio, both knights of the order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus.

Cesare Castiglioni reported in his moral and economic account of November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1866, that he had participated and had the honor to speak on a personal basis, and to explain what was being done then in Italy in this regard.

He was accompanied by Dr. Pietro Castiglioni. Ruggero Belogi reported that also Dr. Comisetti was present, but the official documents of the Conference don't mention him!

It is certainly however (11) that Comisetti wrote a letter that Dunant read to the members during the same conference.

Accession and ratification of states to the Geneva Convention of 1864:

1. France, September 22<sup>th</sup>, 1864;
2. Switzerland, October 1<sup>st</sup> 1864;
3. Belgium, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1864;
4. Holland, November 29<sup>th</sup> 1864;
5. Italy, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1864.

United Italy, newly established in March 1861, was the fifth nation ratifying the treaty!

### August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1864

4<sup>th</sup> memory of Palasciano on the neutrality of the wounded soldiers. He argued that "his" idea of neutrality received full approval and valuable historical support from the now concluded Geneva Conference.

He regretted that the impulse of improving lives of wounded veterans came not from eminent medical experts but from the travel impressions of Mr. Dunant, an amateur nurse.

Thus all the rights that medical science had already acquired on such significant progress of civilization through its publications were ignored (10).

### December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1864

Florence became the capital of Italy.

### December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1864

Meeting of the Milan Committee of the "Italian Association for the rescue of injured or sick people in wartime".

Adoption of the first regulation.

Some other commissions of the Italian Medical Association had responded to the call of June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1864 issued by the Milan Committee.

15 committees were formed, including Bergamo (the first), then Brescia, Como, Cremona, Ferrara, Florence and Monza. The Milan Committee was divided into 4 sections, each with a different function:

1st - fundraising,

2nd - object collection,

3rd - food preservation,

4th - preparation of medical and nursing staff and rescue teams, perhaps the beginning of what will be the military corps of the Red Cross (June 1<sup>st</sup> 1866).

The doctors asked for the honor of carrying the sword, which at the time was not granted. The ladies could not participate in the fourth section.

### Conclusions

Our ambition was to take a bird's eye view on what "Un Souvenir de Solferino" produced in Italy.

The first part of our study evokes the age of enthusiasm aroused by the book. This was associated with voluntary dynamics, with the horror of the suffering of the victims sent to the slaughter of war and to the patriotic fervor.

The second part is based on the overall consolidation of the Italian Red Cross. In that time, there were no wars that concerned us directly, but civil emergencies for which the Italian Red Cross had to change. This second part can be read as the *bureaucratization* of the humanitarian institution from 1882 - 84 onwards.

It is in the first period, from 1863 to the proclamation of Florence as the Capital of Italy, that “Un Souvenir de Solferino” was translated and published in Italy. In the second period, we forgot it so that in the 5th International Conference of the Red Cross in Rome, in 1892, also Dunant was almost forgotten: 500 lire of financial aid was assigned to him when known that he lived in misery.

Certainly with the *bureaucratization* of the Italian Red Cross the fundamental ideas of “Un souvenir de Solferino” have been subjected to the needs of “government diplomacy”, and perhaps not only in Italy.

Finally, we argue that “Un souvenir de Solferino” is the real Gospel of the Red Cross volunteer and that the readings, studies and ideas about that “Gospel” can be infinite, like his memory.

In our several publications we define “Un Souvenir” as the *Alpha and Omega* of the Red Cross (12). Indeed, this book contains all the past, the present and the future of the Red Cross for centuries to come.

What today is called “advocacy” -the protection of the vulnerable- was suggested and predicted by Henry Dunant 150 years ago!

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