

Uruguay

We have received a most interesting work from the Uruguayan Red Cross. This is an account of that National Society's history since its founding and we think the following summary will be of interest, since it shows how deeply rooted the Red Cross is in Latin America.

*The Crusaders of Uruguay*¹, is a short but moving account full of life and heroism covering a vast area, of the Uruguayan Red Cross since its founding to the present day. In this well documented little book, Colonel Alcides A. Martinez Montero, a leading personality who is the delegate of the National Ministry of Defence with the Uruguayan Red Cross, closely describes with objectivity the salient facts of the principal stages in the development of that Red Cross Society of Latin America.

It was in 1897, at a time when Uruguay, after its successful struggle for independence, was in the throes of civil war, that the first steps were taken to give assistance to the wounded on the battlefield, first of all in the form of private aid societies. The author writes in this connection... "We now find ourselves in 1897, a fateful year for the Uruguayan Red Cross, or the Red Cross of Christian Women as it was called when it made its first faltering appearance. The executive committee was especially composed of neutral personalities. At dawn, on March 18, 1897, the first medical train left Montevideo for the battle areas in various parts of the interior"...

We were soon to learn that in December 1898 the Uruguayan Red Cross attempted to be recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross. It struck a first obstacle since Uruguay was not a signatory to the Geneva Convention of 1864. Furthermore, its Charter did not conform legally with those of the other Red Cross Societies. It did not, however, allow itself to be discour-

¹ Los Cruzados del Uruguay, Historia de la Cruz Roja Uruguaya, Biblioteca General Antigas, No. 43, Centro Militar, Montevideo.

aged and in this connection we read... "The first step to be realized in this direction was to alter its organic charter in October 1899, by removing from women the exclusive right of belonging to the association. These steps were to bear fruit on April 6, 1900, when both sides of the Legislature ratified the document, and on the 9th of the same month the Executive sanctioned Law No. 2631 which reads as follows: "The Senate and the House of Representatives of the East Uruguayan Republic, meeting in general assembly decree: *Art. 1.* The East Uruguayan Republic accedes to the clauses recorded in the Geneva Convention of August 22, 1864 and to the additional articles of the said Convention of October 5, 1868. In conformity with our legislation, the recognition by the International Committee of the Uruguayan Red Cross dates from April 9, 1900, although the ICRC will not make this publicly known until June 15, 1900."

After this historic date other opportunities were offered the Uruguayan Red Cross to exercise its activities. In 1904 a series of riots and fratricidal fighting broke out throughout the country. "However great the task accomplished previously by the Red Cross, the year 1904 called forth immense efforts from our part since, we have already pointed out, the whole country had become a seething cauldron and the forces armed by the government and the revolutionaries were very numerous on both sides. Losses in deaths and wounded greatly surpassed those of the previous civil war. A simple circular from the Central Committee was sufficient for the authorities of the interior to form commissions to take direct action on the battlefields. Under a hail of bullets aid was brought to the unfortunate ones who were losing their blood for their country. Women volunteers and nuns organized and took part in setting up night watches in the hospitals or drove ambulances available to them. After a relatively short lapse of time, more than 52 sections of the Red Cross carried out their duties courageously and many hospitals were established..."

Colonel Martinez Montero also gives an attractive description of Señora Ramos de Segarra, founder and president of the Central Committee of the Uruguayan Red Cross from 1897 to 1927. She was soon to become the guiding spirit of the Red Cross through her prodigious capacity for work and her spirit of self-sacrifice.

The author devotes the second part of the book to the multiple activities of the Uruguayan Red Cross in peace-time and amongst these, since Uruguay is also a maritime nation, of Red Cross action in saving life at sea and on the perilous estuary of the Rio de la Plata. The great dangers to which navigation is exposed along the Atlantic coast and the Rio de la Plata are no secrets to the inhabitants of our country. In the almost continuous numbers of shipwrecks the Red Cross carries out constructive work, which, unfortunately was not always sufficiently supported by the official authorities or by private enterprise. In 1899 the Society outlined an ambitious project to establish a series of life-saving stations. This was put into effect in November of the same year."

Colonel Martinez Montero underlines the importance of Pan-american mutual aid as well as that of the Uruguayan Red Cross action on behalf of youth movements. "The new organization gradually accomplished its mission during the years of peace which followed the tragic and bloody internal conflicts. If it frequently had to struggle against a lack of understanding generally on the part of the public, it succeeded, however, in 1934 in putting its first Constitution into force, which was approved by the Council of Primary Education. Later it published an explanatory pamphlet entitled, *What the Junior Red Cross is*. In spite of all its efforts, it was not until 1949 that youth interested itself in this work by founding no less than 46 local committees in that year, for the distribution of clothing, food, books and reviews in the interior of the Republic, and also for a wide exchange of correspondence with other countries. Whilst continuing this campaign, the institution took root in the interior where it set up committees in nearly every school visited by the authorities of the Junior Red Cross, with remarkable success. This movement is at present expanding and developing."

The author describes the internal action, improvements to hospitals and hospital centres, children's nurseries, milk campaigns etc... He allots an important place to international actions, to visits made to Uruguay by foreign delegates from the International Committee and the League. He also mentions study scholarships allotted to Uruguayan women in order to enable them to undergo

courses in Geneva, and the better to know the objects and the action of the two international institutions of the Red Cross.

Before concluding he gives a copy of a true historical document, of a letter written by the initiator of the Red Cross, Henry Dunant, to the President of the Central Committee of the Uruguayan Red Cross, dated April 3, 1902, and which accompanied a copy of his book, *A Memory of Solferino*. He wrote: "It would have given me pleasure and done me a great honour to have been visited by Madame Marguerite Uriante de Weber Jackson, honorary Vice-President of your noble Institution, if my health had permitted. But I fear, in view of my condition, that it will be impossible for this to be done. I would therefore prefer that the honorary Vice-President should not make a needless journey here to the mountains overlooking Lake Constance."

The Crusaders of Uruguay is a short work, concise and packed with information, which describes the national as well as the international rôle of the Uruguayan Red Cross since its foundation in 1897 until the present day.