

Creation of a new climate.—It is common knowledge that green belts produce humidity, leading to the formation and condensation of clouds and to rainfall. At present, these cloud formations either pass over arid zones without falling as rain or else they evaporate. Hence, there is a constantly decreasing amount of rain in regions which, before anything else, require water in order that they might flourish and that animal and vegetable life might be possible under suitable conditions. But the volume of rainfall gets less as the desert encroaches upon the vegetation; consequently the disappearance of plants leads to the establishment of a drier climate. For, though rain is essential to the birth of vegetation, the latter in its turn plays a significant role in the conditions propitious for rainfall.

Trees, that is to say the creation of forests, help to reduce floods and to make better use of precipitations. When the earth is hard and dry, water quickly runs off the surface in torrential streams without being conserved by infiltration into the soil. Strong torrents rush down valleys, sweeping along everything in their path and often causing disasters.

Trees are therefore useful for the retention of soil and for the prevention of erosion. They furnish shelter for food and forage crops, stabilize hydrographic networks and produce humus.

The action carried out by the Red Crescent in this respect is therefore of great importance, although it is only a part of the extensive programmes set up by the authorities. »

Switzerland

The 86th general meeting of Swiss Red Cross delegates took place in Lausanne on 5 and 6 June 1971 under the chairmanship of Professor Hans Haug, president of the National Society.

Mr. Marcel A. Naville conveyed the ICRC's good wishes and delivered an address in which, after expressing the gratitude of the institution of which he is president, for the generous support which the Swiss Red Cross has unfailingly given to the ICRC, he reviewed the various occasions on which the International Committee was

able to appreciate the effectiveness of that co-operation in international relief work, particularly in Jordan. He also mentioned another field, no less important, namely international humanitarian law and he referred to the work of the Conferences of Red Cross and government experts which were convened by the ICRC in The Hague and Geneva. He pointed out the significance of that undertaking for the protection of mankind and of basic human rights.

In his opening address, Professor Hans Haug outlined the current activities undertaken by the Swiss Red Cross in Switzerland and abroad. He quoted figures which testified to the constantly increasing duties of the Society, such as blood transfusion and the teaching of nursing. The annual report for 1970, recently published in Berne, shows a considerable increase in services provided by regional blood transfusion organizations. Blood donations rose from 249,562 in 1969 to 266,295 in 1970, an increase of almost 7%. Professional nursing services in 1970 broke new ground, as new schools for nursing assistants were opened and others were recognized by the Central Committee.

On the occasion of the general meeting, five doctors, four nurses and a nursing student held a round table discussion at which each discussed from his own point of view certain problems which arise today in the care of the sick. In this connection we might mention some of the ideas put forward by the director of a nursing school which may be of interest to those in charge of other nursing services. The Swiss Red Cross has carried out a useful experiment and several National Societies which are similarly placed will realize how worthwhile it was in these times when in many countries there is an acute shortage of nursing personnel.

Much is said today about the spectacular progress of medicine and it is generally the results achieved by surgery which are meant. On the other hand, not so much is known of the tremendous progress achieved in the rehabilitation of accident casualties, paralysis patients, the disabled and even of old people. Most of the time, however, such rehabilitation courses extend for weeks and even months, during which time the patients step by step approach cure thanks to the help and dedication of the teams of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, ergotherapists, social workers and occupational consultants.

In 1961 the need to found a new category of professional nurses mainly to take care of these patients, in other words nursing personnel whose training had been oriented towards the administration of basic nursing, was recognized. As a result the Swiss Red Cross diploma was introduced for nursing assistants having completed such training. They have today become the indispensable assistants of nurses. The vocation of nursing assistant has attractions as, after 18 months of training, it gives access to a varied field of activity. Furthermore, it is available to middle-aged persons who wish to change their occupation in order to care for the sick.

Thanks to the introduction of that profession, the Swiss Red Cross has considerably broadened the basis of recruitment. Henceforth, nursing assistants will undoubtedly be appreciated as members of medico-social teams working outside the hospital, for home nursing, work in polyclinics and assistance to the elderly; for if we are to relieve our hospitals of some of their burden, we must attach importance to nursing outside the hospital. There are in Switzerland today 22 schools for nurses and nursing assistants; 18 are recognized by the Swiss Red Cross. This is incontrovertible proof of the extent of the need. So far 1,700 nurses and nursing assistants have been trained but many more will be required in the years to come.