

Predestinated Geniuses: Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant

Introduction

In the month of May, the anniversary of the birth of two relevant figures in the health, social and humanitarian field is celebrated: Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant (Figures 1 & 2).

Both had a major humanitarian role and whose works continue to develop, they were ahead of their time who changed history. Florence Nightingale, the heroine of the Crimean War and mother of modern Nursing and Henry Dunant, founder of the International Red Cross Movement and promoter of the Geneva Conventions.

Biography of Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant

Florence Nightingale was born in 1820 in Florence, the following year the family would return to England; Henry Dunant was born in 1828 in Geneva (Switzerland); both came from wealthy families and received a careful and complete education and were contemporaries.

Since he was little, Henry Dunant was very sensitive to the most disadvantaged - he accompanied his mother to visit and bring help to needy families and the sick - and as a young man he went to prison to provide reading to the prisoners.

six years later, in 1855, he laid the foundations for the creation of the Universal Alliance of Youth, international organization.



Figure 1 Florence Nightingale.

At the age of 17, Florence Nightingale felt an “inner calling” to serve others and decided to become a nurse against the will of her parents since it was considered an inappropriate activity for a woman of her class; She also had to face the social conventions of the time for being a woman. She traveled through Europe and Egypt studying the different hospital systems, and trained in mathematics and statistics.

At the age of 21, Henry Dunant created, in Geneva, the Christian Union of Youth (UCJG) -Association for study and social works-, and



Figure 2 Henry Dunant.

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At the same time he militated against slavery

In 1853 Dunant joined the important Lullin and Sautter Exchange Office in Geneva. Later he dedicated himself to the mercantile world and established the Society of the Mons-Djémila Mills in Algeria, with the desire to fertilize the country. Due to bureaucratic issues he decides to meet with Napoleon III who was in Lombardy, fighting against Austria, for the unity of Italy.

He arrived in Castiglione (Lombardy) on June 25, 1859, the day after the battle of Solferino, one of the deadliest of the century, where some 40,000 wounded, dying and dead lay unaided and unattended. Faced with the horrifying spectacle, Dunant forgot about his affairs and went into action by organizing a voluntary service, supported by somewhat reticent local women. At first, with the enemy soldiers, Dunant encouraged them by saying: *Tutti fratelli*.

In 1851, Florence Nightingale, aged 30, after visiting different hospitals, enrolled in Pastor Theodor Fliedner's Hospital in Kaiserswerth, Germany, where she would train as a nurse.

In 1853 she took the position of superintendent at the Institute for the Care of Sick Women in London. During the Crimean War (1853-1856) the Secretary of War of the British Empire, Sidney Herbert, requested her help. In 1854 she and a team of 38 nurses went to the Scutari Field Hospital (Turkey) to provide care to wounded British soldiers.

Both figures had to confront the military authorities in order to achieve their reforms. Nightingale fought in Scutari to improve the sanitary, hygienic and food conditions of British military hospitals, reducing mortality, and Dunant to create permanent societies of volunteer nurses in times of peace to intervene in the event of war.

In 1855, an article in *The Times* praised Nightingale's humanitarian work in the Crimea. In 1857, in a poem by Longfellow, she became known as the "lady with the lamp" because of her nightly rounds tending to the sick. Dunant was called the "knight in white" by Charles Dickens, evoking how the wounded at Solferino nicknamed him due to the color of the suit he wore.

Upon her return to London, Florence was greeted as a heroine. He created the Nightingale Rose Diagram or Polar Area Diagram, to represent the mortality of soldiers in the Crimean War by cause and month, demonstrating the need for health reform in military hospitals, which led to the establishment of "the Royal Commission into the Health of the Army."

Most relevant publications

Both wrote historical books of great consequence and were translated into many languages. Henry Dunant published, in Geneva in 1862, the book "A Remembrance of Solferino" in which he not only described a terrible battle but also proposed the creation in each country of a national relief society in favor of wounded soldiers to provide support in case of war, to the health services of the armies. This book would give rise to the Committee of Five, later the International Committee, which organized the International Conference of 1863, - where the statute of neutrality and the emblem of the Red Cross was approved - and the Diplomatic Conference of 1864 where the First Convention was adopted of Geneva, giving birth to the International Red Cross Movement and International Humanitarian Law.

Florence Nightingale, in 1859 published the book "Notes on Nursing", which was the first book written specifically for the training of nurses, she also published "Notes on Hospitals" and others. In 1860,

she created the first School of Nursing, named after her, at St. Thomas' Hospital in London, and elevated nursing to the rank of profession. She trained nurses for hospitals, home care and teaching. She trained nurses who later moved to different countries expanding the profession, like Linda Richards in the United States, etc. She was the creator of the first conceptual model of nursing. She also contributed to improving sanitary conditions in India, reducing mortality.

The Red Cross Movement, in the same way, led to the creation of Hospitals, Nursing Schools, improvements in medical transportation and the importance of volunteering, throughout the world.

Both characters expressed their mutual admiration, Henry Dunant for Nightingale's humanitarian work in Crimea and she, who at first did not see Dunant's proposal as possible on an international level, influenced the creation of the British Red Cross in 1870.

They were fruitful writers, leaving their reflections, thoughts and projects in books and articles, as well as numerous correspondence.

Florence Nightingale left a great legacy in statistics, so in 1859 she was the first woman member of the Royal Statistical Society and in 1874 she was named an honorary member of the American Statistical Association.

Henry Dunant, dedicated to the founding of the Red Cross, left his businesses in Algeria in the hands of a disloyal partner, causing ruin. After years of poverty and abandonment he was discovered by a journalist at the Heiden Hospital (Switzerland), who wrote an article remembering the founder of the Red Cross. From that moment on, hundreds of tributes and recognitions came to him from all over the world.

High distinctions and decorations received

In 1883 Queen Victoria awarded Nightingale the first award of the Royal Red Cross and in 1907 she was the first woman to receive the Order of Merit. Henry Dunant received the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901. In 1912 the International Committee of the Red Cross established the Florence Nightingale Medal in her honor, being the highest international distinction for nurses and nursing assistants, who distinguish themselves in exceptional humanitarian acts.

The Henry Dunant Medal is the highest award of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement for exceptional services performed by its members. On May 12, Florence Nightingale's birthday, International Nurses Day is celebrated and May 8, Henry Dunant's birthday, World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day is celebrated.

Both died in the same year, 1910, Florence Nightingale on August 13 in London and Henry Dunant on October 30 in Heiden (Switzerland).

Reflection

It is worth asking: What can so many similarities mean? We do not believe that it is the result of chance.

Both were inspired by an "inner calling", Nightingale feeling a call to service at Embley in 1837 and Dunant writing *A Remembrance of Solferino* in whose manuscript she expressed: "I felt elevated, inspired and dominated by a superior force (...). I had a confused and profound feeling of intuition, that my work was an instrument (...), to fulfill a work destined, in the future, to infinite developments for Humanity..."

Contemplating the time in which the protagonists lived, in Europe, the Industrial Revolution was experienced, which brought a change in the social, economic and political aspects of humanity due to large-scale production through the use of machinery.

The 19th century was the century of great inventions. We will mention the railway, the electric telegraph, industrial steel, dynamite, the telephone, the electric light bulb, the phonograph, the radio, the cinema, etc. The use of steam caused a revolution in land transportation and navigation and later the appearance of the automobile and the airplane with an internal combustion engine.

Likewise, progress was made in the war industry, first with iron and then with steel, building battleships and submarines.

In this context of industrial progress, rivalries between countries began to appear. Despite the enormous progress, dark clouds heralded the formation of a great storm and this broke out with the First World War.

Prior to these technological advances, humanity had been provided with a health structure capable of alleviating suffering, first in wars and then in society. We believe that the appearance of Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant at that time is not coincidental. We refer to Dunant's book, entitled *The Bloody Future*, composed of various texts, written between 1864 and 1897, prior to the outbreak of the First World War from which we quote some premonitory paragraphs: "Everything that makes the glory of your so-called civilization will be used in the service of war. Your electric railways, dirigible balloons, submarines, unsinkable ships, suspension bridges, instant photographs, telegraphs, telephones, as well as other wonderful inventions of Graham Bell or Edison, will serve it admirably..." "Europe dragged into a general war and that will undoubtedly lead to the modification of its map..."

And the book ends with these words: "Blood, blood, blood everywhere!" Millions of people were able to benefit during the great conflicts of the 20th century from the humanitarian work of Nightingale and Dunant. Mozart said: "Love is the Soul of genius."

And it was, without a doubt, love that drove our protagonists to Crimea and Solferino, creating, Henry Dunant, the most important Humanitarian Organization in the world and Florence Nightingale

the most beautiful profession in the world. Creations that continue to develop. Humanity owes a debt of gratitude to these exceptional beings.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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