

Gustave Moynier and the legal construction of humanitarian action

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If Henry Dunant gave the impulse, Gustave Moynier built the institution. A lawyer by training and president of the Société genevoise d'utilité publique (Geneva Public Welfare Society), Moynier presided over the International Committee of the Red Cross for more than forty years, until his death in 1910.¹ He drafted the statutes, organised the conferences, maintained the correspondence with the national societies and developed the doctrine of humanitarian law. As early as 1872 he proposed the creation of an international court to punish violations of the Geneva Convention, an idea that would be realised only at the end of the twentieth century with the International Criminal Court.²

The contrast between Dunant and Moynier illustrates two dimensions of International Geneva: vision and organisation, impulse and rule. The city brought these two dimensions together, and the second secured the permanence of the first. International Geneva owes as much to the lawyers, administrators and diplomats who built its institutions as to the visionaries who inspired them.

This lesson holds for the financial centre as well. The Geneva bankers of the nineteenth century, contemporaries of Moynier and drawn from the same milieu, shared his conception of law as an instrument of trust. The Société genevoise d'utilité publique, founded in 1828, brought together bankers, lawyers, physicians and pastors around works of education, hygiene and welfare.³ International Geneva and the financial centre were born of the same social milieu and inherited common values from it.

1 Notes

1. Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse (DHS; Historical Dictionary of Switzerland), art. "Moynier, Gustave": born on 21 September 1826 in

Geneva, died on 21 August 1910 in Sécheron, lawyer; member of the Société genevoise d'utilité publique from 1855, which he presided over ten times between 1858 and 1884; "President of the International Committee of the Red Cross from 1864 until his death"; initiator of the international conference of 1863 and the diplomatic conference of 1864.

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2. Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse (DHS), art. "Moynier, Gustave": Moynier promoted "the foundation, in 1873, of the Institut de droit international in Ghent"; author of *La guerre et la charité* (1867) and *La Croix-Rouge, son passé et son avenir* (1882); Institut de droit international, "Gustave Moynier (1826-1910)", by Paul Ruegger, *Livre du centenaire 1873-1973* (idi-iil.org). ↩
3. Société genevoise d'utilité publique, "Présentation" (archives.sgup.ch): private non-profit association founded in 1828; Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse (DHS), art. "Moynier, Gustave" (member from 1855, president ten times between 1858 and 1884); DHS, art. "Croix-Rouge" (Moynier presented Dunant's ideas to the SGUP, over which he presided). ↩

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