Recently, on occasion of the 90th anniversary of the terrible year 1915, an unique book appeared in Serbia. This book is aimed to remind our generation of medical people, the majority of them women, who risked their freedom and sacrificed their lives for the health of other people – in this case, for a small nation that suffered very much during the World War I.

It is generally thought that the World War I was the greatest disaster in the whole history of human race; that is why it is remembered as the Great War. For Serbia, it was a catastrophe: more than half of Serbian male population, from 18 to 60 years of age, perished outright. It is estimated that Serbia lost over one million of lives - more than third of the whole population of old Serbia. It was a true demographic collapse: the small Serbian nation has faced the risk of extinction.....

Among other war disasters, particularly dreadful was the typhus epidemic. Horrible ciphers inform that, during January-February 1915, only in Belgrade 50–100 people died each day. This epidemic ravaged Serbia – it took more than 300 000 of civilian lives.

Upon the appeal of the Serbian Government, several medical missions were sent to Serbia. Legendary Dr Elsie Maud Inglis, the founder of Scottish Women Hospital, led a group of doctors, nurses and volunteers, who hurried to help “gallant little nation and its soldiers” when the help was badly needed. Many of these women died during the epidemic of typhoid fever. Let’s mention Dr Elisabeth Ross and five of her nurses and volunteers, who came in Kragujevac on Christmas 1915, when epidemic were on its heights, and who were victims of this terrible illness. They are buried in small cemetery in Kragujevac, the city that, much more than other places in Serbia, and due to the efforts of the author of this book, keeps the memory of these extraordinary women.

Not only Scottish women were the part of this mission. Many Russian, Australian, Canadian and American doctors and nurses gave their competent help not only during the horrible year 1915, but also before and after that. The same is true for Greece: the very first humanitarian missions that came were two Greek missions - that of the king of Greece, and the one of Red Cross of Greece. The first mission arrived in Serbia as early as in September 1914. Later, Greeks gave shelter to Serbian soldiers also on their own territory. When arrived to Greek islands Corfu and Vido after terrible retreat through Albania (so-called Golgotha of Serbia), almost all soldiers were in miserable state. For example, out of 8000 young soldiers that started retreat towards Greece, only 320 were considered as healthy upon arrival to Corfu. Small island Vido, which housed ill soldiers, soon became unable to bury so many corpses, and the surrounding sea became so-called Blue Cemetery for Serbs.

At the end of the Great War, the Third Greek division contributed to the liberation of Serbia. During war operations and during the epidemic of Spanish fever, 385 of Greek soldiers died. They are buried in the Greek soldiers’ cemetery, next to the Serbian soldiers’ cemetery, in small town of Pirot, on the south of Serbia. In the same time, it is (at least, it was) the largest Greek cemetery outside Greece. The monument erected at this place symbolizes the friendship between two nations, which has been lasting uninterrupted for many centuries – a rather rare case in the Balkans.

Dr Vuković book is the result of 25-years work, during which period author has accrued as many documents, letters, and press articles as possible. This book is dedicated to the memory of „the deeds of all members of various international medical missions, which represent a superb achievement of humanity, so far unsurpassed in history“. Throughout the whole book dominates the author’s feeling that this memory has been fading, against which he decisively opposes. That is why John Hoyle, the Ambassador of Australia in Serbia (1988), described Dr Vuković as „a doctor who treats and cures history“. I agree with Dr Vuković that every and each people mentioned in his book deserve to be remembered – and to be paid tribute on occasion of this year, ninety years after disastrous year 1915.

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