

Henry Dunant and Norman Bethune: a Canadian surgeon who worked with H. Dunant at the Battle of Solferino

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SUMMARY

Following a description of both scenarios involved in the Battle of Solferino (1859), and the consequent horrors which spurred Henry Dunant to set up the International Red Cross organisation, for which he received the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, the present paper discusses the meeting between Henry Dunant and the Canadian surgeon Norman Bethune (1822-1892). During the days immediately after the battle, they worked together, and Bethune voluntarily operated on the injured soldiers, probably at the hospital of Brescia.

In the final part, we describe the life of Norman Bethune, grandfather of the famous Henry Norman Bethune, hero of Maoist China. Norman Bethune was not only a famous surgeon in Toronto, but also Dean of the Medical School at Trinity College in 1856, a colleague of Dr George Ansel Sterling Ryerson, (recognised as founder of the Canadian Red Cross), and other members of the First Central Council of the same organisation. We suggest that Dr Norman Bethune communicated his Italian and European experience with Henry Dunant the founder of the International Red Cross, to his colleagues.

RÉSUMÉ

Après un descriptif de la Bataille de Solferino (1859) et des horreurs qui l'on caractérisées, cet article le présente au lecteur les actions qui ont porté Henry Dunant à créer la Croix Rouge (pour laquelle il a obtenu, en 1910, le Premier Prix Nobel pour la Paix). On parle ensuite de la rencontre entre Henry Dunant et le médecin canadien Norman Bethune (1822-1892). Dans les jours suivant la Bataille de Solferino ils ont travaillé ensemble et Bethune a opéré les blessés à l'hôpital de Brescia, comme chirurgien volontaire.

Ensuite on décrit la vie de Norman Bethune, grand-père du fameux Henry Norman Bethune, héros national de la Chine à l'époque de Mao.

Norman Bethune était un médecin célèbre à Toronto; il était aussi titulaire de la Faculté de Médecine de Trinity Collège (1856). Ses collègues étaient le Dr George Ansel Sterling Ryerson, (qui aurait fondé le Croix Rouge Canadienne) et d'autres membres du 1er Comité de la Croix Rouge Canadienne. Les auteurs pensent que Dr Norman Bethune ait communiqué son expérience italienne et européenne en compagnie de Henry Dunant qui avait fondé la Croix Rouge Internationale.

The 10th December 2001 was the hundredth anniversary of the presentation of the award for the First Nobel Peace Prize which was made to the citizen of Geneva, Mr Henry Dunant, for the foundation of the International Red Cross Organisation. The life of this apostle of humanity is a long tale (he was to die in 1910 at the age of 82) of great success, but also of much and harsh suffering (1).

His idea was that on the fields of battle on land and sea, the injured soldier is no longer a fighter but simply an individual in need of medical assistance and loving care, in an epoch-making statement.

We can divide the history of Mankind into two eras; the period preceding the first Geneva Convention (August 1864) and the one following it. From that date onwards, Men became a little less animal-like and acquired spiritual values of Humanity and Love which helped them transcend their merely physical aspect (2,3).

In August 2001, the History of Medicine Group at the University of Florence under my co-ordination published the first Italian version of the *Memoires* which H.Dunant wrote in the last years of his life, to vindicate strongly his role as the creator and founder of the Red

Cross. This work complements another, better known work written by Dunant, *Souvenir de Solferino*, and translated into 20 languages (4,5).

Henry Dunant was born in Geneva in 1828 into a wealthy aristocratic family of Calvinist beliefs. Especially from his mother, he received an education based on brotherly love and spiritual values. His parents were wont to help the needy. They opened the gates of their estates to the orphans of Geneva so that they too could enjoy the air as well as the beauties of the garden. They accompanied their children to visit the prisoners of the Penal Baths at Toulon. H.Dunant spent a happy childhood and early adult life in the family, but it was quite solitary. At the age of 25, he was employed in the bank of a Geneva exchange-clerk and began his career as a business man. He visited Algeria and Tunisia, and wanted to make Tunisia the Garden of Europe; he was supported in part by Napoleon III in this idea. In June 1859, Dunant was in Italy where the Emperor was starting to move against Austria. The 24th June 1859 is an important date in the history of Italy, Europe, and indeed all humanity, if one thinks that the horrors and dreadful events of that date were to push H. Dunant to set up the *Convention pour l'amélioration du sort des militaires blessés dans les*

armees en campagne (Convention for the betterment of the fate of wounded soldiers on campaign), or in short, what was to become the International Red Cross Mission (6).

In the days following that terrible 24th June 1859 he was to meet the Canadian surgeon Norman Bethune (1822-1892), a descendent of the important Bethune family and grandfather of the more famous Henry Norman Bethune (1890-1939), physician and surgeon known as 'the Chinese/China man, given his collaboration with Mao Tse Tung during the war of 'liberation' of the Chinese people 1937-1939 (7). (Fig 1).

Both the *Souvenir de Solferino* and the *Memoires* are autobiographical works in which Dunant reveals his narrative ability and, especially *Souvenir de Solferino*, is a dramatic reportage of the horrors of the 1859 battle - at that time fire-arms had become more precise and deadly. Since the Crimean War the bullets, oblong-conical instead of the old spherical balls, the cannons and the guns lined with ever-increasing power of the powders, provoked ever more serious wounds and left no way out in a skirmish even at a distance (8). Solferino, for example, was a victory thanks to the lined French cannons which were able to strike the Austrian reserves as far back as the rear echelon. At the time of signing the Villafranca Peace Treaty Field-Marshal Hess, Major Chief of Staff to Emperor Franz Joseph, was said to have confessed that at the Battle of Solferino, the Austrians had 50,000 men out of action because, he was reported to have confessed, the lined French cannons were decimating his reserves. This Battle was very crude and cruel; it was undoubtedly one of the bloodiest of all battles fought in the 19th century, and Henry Dunant was a faithful reporter of the events.

Some 300,000 men fought on a front which was little more than 15 km long, from 6 o'clock in the morning until 9 o'clock in the evening when, finally, the troops of Vittorio Emanuele II, on the left wing of the allies, attacking from San Marino, crushed the stubborn and courageous 8th Corps of the Austro-Hungarian army commanded by General Benedek.

The description of the battle is indeed terrifying. We cite just two short glimpses which refer to a bayonet attack followed by a horse artillery barrage, as well as the gratuitous atrocity which followed:

'Ici e'est une lutte corps a corps, horrible, effroyable: Autrichiens et Allies se foulent aux pieds, s'entretuent sur des cadavres sanglants, s'assomment a coups de croisse, se brisent le crane, s'eventrent avec le sabre ou la bayonnette; il n'y a plus de quartier, e'est une boucherie, un combat de betes feroces, furieuses et ivres de sang; les blesses meme se

défendent jusqu'à la dernière extrémité, celui qui n'a plus d'armes saisit à la gorge son adversaire qu'il déchire avec ses dents.

La cavalerie française fond sur la cavalerie autrichienne: uhlands et hussars se transpercent et se déchirent; les cheveux excités par l'ardeur du combat participent eux-mêmes à cette fureur, ils se jettent sur les cheveux ennemis qu'ils mordent avec rage pendant que leurs cavaliers se sabrent et se pourfendent.

Plus loin c'est l'artillerie lancée à fond de train et qui suit la cavalerie; elle se fraie un passage à travers les cadavres et les blessés gisant indistinctement sur le sol: alors les cervelles jaillissent, les membres sont brisés et broyés, les corps rendus méconnaissable, la terre s'abreuve littéralement de sang, et la plaine est jonchée de débris humains.'

The evening of 24th June, 40,000 men - of whom 5,621 were Sardinians, 12,720 French and more than 20,000 Austrians - lay in a shattered landscape; lifeless bodies or poor suffering wounded waiting to be helped.

Thus, already the very night of 24th June, Dunant came face to face with the terrible horror:

'Le soleil du 25 éclaira l'un des spectacles qui se puissent présenter à l'imagination. Le champ de bataille est partout couvert de cadavres d'hommes et de chevaux; les routes, les fossés, les ravins, les buissons, les près sont parsemés de corps morts, et les abords de Solferino en sont littéralement criblés. Les champs sont ravagés, les blés et les maïs sont couchés, les haies renversés, les vergers saccagés, de loin en loin on recontre des mares de sang.'

The weight of casualties requiring treatment grew in a startling manner throughout the day. After just a few hours, the military ambulances were completely overcome with work and the military health service was found to be totally inadequate. At that point churches, convents, houses, squares, wide roads, ail became improvised makeshift hospitals: from Carpendolo to Castelfreddo, from Medole to Guidizzolo and Volta and, especially, at Castiglione délie Stiviere. All became a huge crucible or melting pot of dead and injured. Up to the 29th of June, when the évacuation of the injured to the 'hospitals' of Brescia, Cremona, Bergamo, and Milan began in an organised manner, the 5,300 inhabitants of Castiglione had received more than 6,500 injured. Two to three weeks later, the appalling number of 30,000 wounded was reached here.

In H. Dunant's description it is, however, quite clear that the really tragic days were the first three after the battle: it was then that so many lives that could have been saved, were lost.

It was in this painful inferno that Dunant met military and civilian doctors, nurses, men, women and children, all

engaged in an immense task which was certainly beyond their means. Here, in one of the most beautiful passages of *Souvenir de Solferino*, is how he relates what we may call the 'universal' contribution of one and all, which Italians and other nationalities made to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded:

L'Intendant general de Brescia et le docteur Guilla, directeur general des hopiteaux de cette ville, le docteur Comisseti, medecin en chef de l'armee sarde, et le docteur Carlo Cotta, inspecteur sanitaire de la Lombardie, rivaliserent de devouement et doivent etre honorablement signales apres l'illustre baron Larrey, medecin-inspecteur en chef de l'armee francaise; le docteur Isnard, medecin principal de premiere classe; montra une habilete remarquable et comme administrateur; pres de lui, a Brescia, se distingua M. Thierry de Maugras, et toute une phalange de courageux et indefatigables chirurgiens francais dont on voudrait pouvoir citer tous les noms; car, certes, si ceux qui Went peuvent pretendre a des titres de gloire, ceux qui guerissent, et souvent au peril de leur vie, meritent bien l'estime et la reconnaissance. Un chirurgien anglo-americain, le docteur Norman Bettun, professeur d'anatomie a Toronto, dans la Haut-Canada, vint expres de Strasbourg apporter son concours a ces hommes devoues.

Des etudiants en medecin etaient accourus de Bologne, de Pise, et d'autres villes d'Italie. A cote des habitants de Brescia, quelques Francais en passage, des Suisses, et des Beiges, autorises par l'Administration, etaient venus aussi offrir spontanement leur services et visiterent les hopiteaux, se rendant utiles aupres des malades, et leur donnant de legers adoucissements tels que des oranges, des sorbets, des limonades, du tabac!

Help by one individual stands out above the rest: Dr Norman Bettun, Professor of Anatomy at Toronto; he was, as was the norm for anatomists at the time, a trained surgeon. It was this fact which led to our research at the Institute for the History of Medicine at the University of Toronto, directed by my host Professor Edward Shorter. He clarified in no uncertain terms who Dr Norman Bethune was and his role in founding one of the Medical Faculties in the University; Henry Dunant wrote his surname as Bettun instead of Bethune since he belonged to a noble family which goes back to the time of the Counts of Artois:

The family name of Bethune is derived from the city of that name in the ancient Province of Picardie in France. It was called by the Romans 'Betunia in Gaul'. It was the chief city of a barony belonging to a family descended from the Counts of Artois. Since the eleventh century, they have been known as the BETHUNES of PICARDIE. Family names were unknown prior that date.

HISTORY OF THE BETHUNE FAMILY

Mrs J.A.Weisse. (9,10)

In 1428, a member of the Bethune family from the French line went to Scotland and became related to the house of Balfour. An extremely long genealogy of almost three centuries follows, and ends with a nineteenth century Canadian emigrant from Scotland. He was a certain John Bethune, a Presbyterian minister in Glengarry and Montreal. He married Veronica Waddin and they had a large family of nine children. The eldest of these, Angus Bethune, married Louise MacKenzie and to them was born Norman Bethune, the surgeon of Solferino named by Dunant. Norman Bethune married first Janet Nicholson, by whom he had two children, and the second of these, Malcolm - a Presbyterian minister - married Elizabeth Ann Goodwin, by whom he had two children; the second of these was the Dr Henry Norman Bethune, hero of the Peoples' Republic of China and collaborator of Mao-Tse-Tung.

Norman Bethune, the subject of our paper, was born on 13th August 1822 at Moose Factory, Ontario. His father Angus became a famous business man and politician, and was Director of the Bank of Upper Canada. The family moved to Toronto, where he enrolled his son Norman at the Upper Canada College. Norman studied for a diploma in Arts at King's College in Toronto from 1842 till 1845, then from 1845 attended the College Medical School. Finally he moved to London, where he became a surgeon in 1848.

Bethune returned to Toronto in 1849, and in the summer of the next year, (11) together with Drs Hodder-Bowell, Badgley-Hallowell, and Mitchell, founded the third School of Medicine of Toronto, which they named 'The Upper Canada School of Medicine'. The other two schools were J. Ralph's Toronto School of Medicine and King's College. King's College later became the University of Toronto Medical Faculty. Bethune's 'Upper Canada School of Medicine' never actually got underway; however with the Baldwin Act of 1849 Trinity College was laicised and the Bishop, John Strachan, accepted that Bethune and his colleagues establish the new Trinity College Medical Faculty. Lectures there began in 1850.

We found the *Circulars of the Medical Faculty of Trinity College* and, on all of them, the name of Norman Bethune, its Professor of Anatomy and Physiology, appears exactly as reported by Henry Dunant.

For six years this group of rampant, qualified doctors, who defined themselves as 'devout Anglicans', made up

the Faculty of Medicine of Trinity College. Nonetheless, they did not get what they expected. There was no specific recognition on the part of the School directors, nor was there any inkling of a fixed or stable salary: the money they received came exclusively from the 'fees' paid by the students, of which there were not many. In the academic year 1855-56, precisely when Bethune was Head of the Faculty, an incident occurred. In an advertisement under the name of the Faculty, published in a Toronto newspaper called *The Leader* by professors of the Medical Faculty, even those students who did not swear to the 39 Articles of the Church of England were to be admitted. Until then, this had been an obligatory requirement for all those wishing to be enrolled at Trinity College, a confessed Anglican University.

The reaction of the Board was immediate. The professors of the Medical Faculty were asked officially to rectify the advertisement. The entire Academic Body, with Norman Bethune at its head, resigned and so the first Medical Faculty of Trinity College closed (13).

In 1853 the Medical Faculty of the University of Toronto had also been closed. Hence in 1856 Bethune and his colleagues went over to the Toronto School of Medicine run by Dr J. Ralph as part of Victoria University.

In the late 1850s Bethune returned to Europe. He went to Edinburgh, where in 1860 he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (14). The previous year he had been in Strasbourg in France for specialist studies, and it was from there that he set out for Solferino and met Dunant in June-July.

Norman Bethune returned to Toronto in 1860 and became Professor of the Principles and Practice of Medicine at Victoria University. When the religious barriers were dropped towards the beginning of the 1870s, we find him again at the newly re-founded Trinity College Medical Faculty. Here he taught the Principles and Practice of Surgery and Clinical Surgery until the academic year 1880-81 (15, 16). In the Annual Announcement for the Academic Year (*Annus Academicus*) 1881-82, his name does not appear in the list of Professors at Trinity College. There must have been an important meeting between Bethune and Dr George Ansel Sterling Ryerson. Ryerson was born in Toronto on 21st January 1855; he too was a descendant of an important Canadian family, the 'Ryerse Ryerson family.' He, having become a doctor and a medical officer in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Service, was officially recognised as the founder of the Canadian Branch of the British Red Cross Society (17).

Ryerson in his famous memoirs *Looking Backward*, he tells how he was the first to use a Red Cross flag (Fig 2) which he himself had made during the 1885 North West rebellion. (The figure shows a wrong date as courteously pointed out to me by Professor Godfrey, author of the text cited (18) at Fish Creek and Barouche on page 87 of the memoirs). (19)

In chapter 12 of Ryerson's memoirs he relates how, on 16th October 1896, on his return to Canada after holidays in Spain, and having stopped in London to get the proper permits from the British Red Cross, he was able to officially set up the Canadian Branch of the British Red Cross. He is at pains to point out that 'the Canadian Red Cross was the first colonial branch to be established in the British Empire.' The Canadian Red Cross was immediately active during the American-Hispanic War of 1898, and later in the second South African War (the Boer War) of 1899-1902 (20). G.S. Ryerson died in 1925 having dedicated his whole life to the idea of the Red Cross.

In 1880 Ryerson had been a colleague of Norman Bethune at Trinity Medical School. He lists all the names of those elected to membership of the Canadian Branch - Dr J.A. Temple, Surgeon Major Dr Grasset, and those included in the First Report of the Canadian Red Cross Society in the Boer War. Both Temple and Grasset were members of the Medical Faculty at Trinity, the former in the Academic Year 1872-1873 and the latter in the year 1877-78. It is difficult to imagine that Norman Bethune did not talk to them of his European experiences and of his meeting with H. Dunant at Solferino; as far back as 1864 the Red Cross was a world-wide reality and Henry Dunant was recognised — prior to his financial downfall - as its sole founder.

'Memorie LC 4. At that time, in 1867, everyone knew that I was the founder of this organisation; for many years it was called "Opera de Duvant." On the other hand, I always thought that the whole of Europe had undertaken, as it were, public debt of world-wide proportions on behalf of the Convention and the Red Cross. It took a while for it to be properly understood.'

In the Academic Year 1881-82, Norman Bethune disappeared from the list of professors at the Medical Faculty of the Toronto College. Nonetheless, he remained consulting professor at the Toronto Hospital. In 1888, we find him once again in the company of Dr Ryerson, Dr Grasset and Dr Temple (21). This establishes a long period of familiarity and inter-action with the so-called 'founder' of the Canadian Red Cross, Dr Sterling

Ryerson, and with two other members of the First Committee in the first year of its foundation. Unfortunately none of Dr Bethune's writings has been found in the family archives. His last years were marked by sadness, similar to those of the forgotten and impoverished Henry Dunant, for Norman Bethune became an alcoholic, and was assisted, initially, by his favourite son Malcolm. Later, when he remained alone, he went into a home for incurables (22).

There had been an artistic side to Norman Bethune, which we found in some of his sketches which reveal his creativity and technique in drawing (Fig 3). His personality was a complex and fascinating one, and his famous nephew always spoke of him with great admiration.

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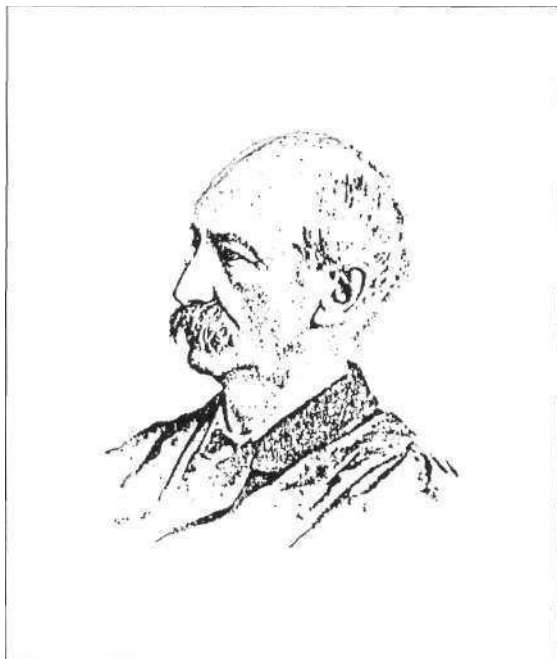
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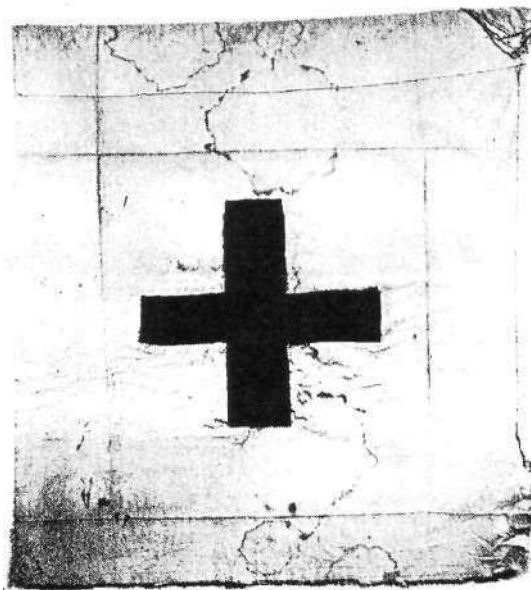
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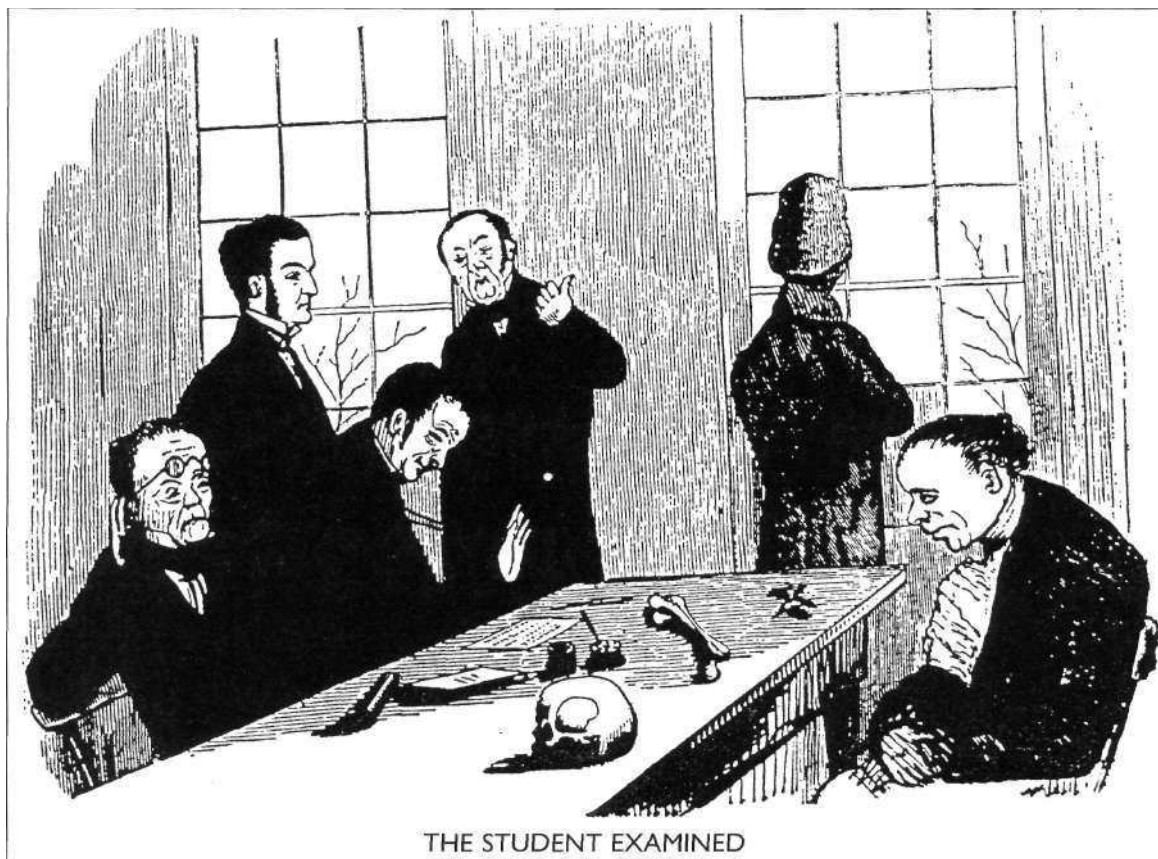
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Norman Bethune (1822-1892), the grandfather.
Portrait by kind permission of Miss Felicity Pope.



The supposed flag of the Canadian Red Cross used by Dr George Sterling Ryerson at the Battle of Fish Creek and Batouche, 1885, on the basis of the correction suggested personally by the author.



THE STUDENT EXAMINED

Drawing marked 'The Exam' by Dr Norman Bethune. By kind permission of Miss Felicity Pope.