

## In Memory of Leopold Boissier

In November 1968, the *International Review* published the sad news of the death of Léopold Boissier and recalled the fine and effective work of the former President of the ICRC for the Red Cross. In one of the leading Swiss newspapers<sup>1</sup>, Mr. F. Siordet, Vice-President of the ICRC, paid a more personal tribute to him, which ended as follows:

In 1956, his colleagues of the International Committee called upon Léopold Boissier to become President. He was promptly to be put to the test. The ICRC had just been reorganized by a reduction of numbers during a period of relative peace. At that moment, there broke out, one after the other, the Suez conflict and the Hungarian revolt. It was again a question of improvising and creating to which the ICRC put all its energies. It was then that Léopold Boissier showed of what he was capable.

So great is his view of the ICRC's task and his own that he subordinates everything to it. He leaves his University teaching and resigns his position as Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to devote himself entirely and without remuneration to the ICRC. He assumed the duties of President in the same whole-hearted way as does a priest, to act as the colour-bearer of a transcendent idea and power. Indeed, the Red Cross is the master idea which saves human lives, of which the ICRC is a valuable instrument in its service. The integrity of this instrument must therefore be jealously guarded and handed down intact to successors, retaining all its effectiveness. This permanent preoccupation animated and characterized Léopold Boissier's tenure as

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<sup>1</sup> Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Zurich, October 27, 1968.

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President. It sometimes led him to defend positions which might have appeared restrictive for fear of seeing the ICRC penetrate, to however small an extent, fields tainted by one or other political ideology. There is no doubt, however, that such intransigence contributed to making the real nature of the ICRC's neutrality better understood and accepted.

Following Max Huber's example, Léopold Boissier had himself previously set himself a time-limit for his tenure of office. On returning to private life he continued to serve the institution by articles in the press, lecturing and giving his balanced advice based on his rich experience as President.

At first sight, this former cavalry officer from an old Genevese family could appear cold, sharp and distant, as is sometimes the case with shy and sensitive people. On getting to know him better, one discovered that the frigid jurist was opposed to the juridical, that this incisive man was against the mathematical spirit, that he always respected an opponent in good faith and that this aloof-seeming person knew how to be very close to human suffering.