

*IN GENEVA***Death of Leopold Boissier, member and former President  
of the ICRC**

The accidental death on October 22, 1968, of its former President, Leopold Boissier, was a severe blow to the International Committee. It will, with faithful gratitude, always remember this man who gave of his best, both intellectually and morally, in the service of the Red Cross.

Leading members of the Geneva cantonal and municipal authorities, the diplomatic corps, international organizations and the university attended the funeral, as well as the presidents of the Red Cross Societies of the Federal Republic of Germany and of Switzerland, the Secretary-General of the League and many members and personnel of the ICRC. Mr. Gonard, the President of the ICRC, in his oration recalled what the work of the Red Cross owed to our departed colleague, to whom he paid the following tribute:

*Everything in our late colleague's career seemed to indicate that it was his destiny to serve the Red Cross, and particularly the International Committee, which founded it.*

*He was the son of an ancient Genevese family in which dedication to one's fellow-man was like a second nature and which has left lasting marks of its concern for the unfortunates of this world, particularly in the form of a foundation. It is known, moreover, that Mrs. de Gasparin, who was born a Boissier, helped Henry Dunant during his early difficulties. No less a tradition was the silence maintained about the good performed, a Christian virtue rarely encountered today and which enhances the value of generosity. This was the noble school in which he was raised by his father, Edmond Boissier who, throughout his life, was a member and then Vice-President of the International Committee, and*

*who, in 1920, was the first to outline the principles of the Red Cross which are today universally proclaimed.*

*The various stages of Leopold Boissier's so full life contributed greatly to forming what I venture to call " his Red Cross personality ". He was a Doctor of Laws, a professor of comparative constitutional law at Geneva University, and the qualities of the jurist and the scholar were discernible in this man who, even before becoming President, directed the ICRC Legal Commission and a working group to define its terms of reference and its programme.*

*Then, at the head of the ICRC, he was the watchful guardian of its doctrine, seeing that the institution did not stray from the straight and narrow path laid down by the founders, for he knew that from this rectitude it would draw its strength and prestige.*

*He was also a diplomat who began his rise under the aegis of Gustave Ador and Max Huber in the service of the Swiss nation ; his diplomacy was manifest when he presided over the ICRC whose international activity implied close connections with the representatives of all countries. In this, with the thorough-bred courtesy for which he was known, Leopold Boissier worked felicitously to smooth out difficulties, avoid disputes and forge links of trust and effective co-operation with the leaders of various countries, for he understood that the future and success of the Red Cross depended on its unity and universality.*

*A third facet of his personality is reflected in his activity as the Secretary-General of the Interparliamentary Union and President of associations working for peace, whilst he was an indefatigable advocate for the promotion of human rights, respect for minority groups and the advent of a world of greater justice where oppression would be banished. This led him, within the Red Cross, to work in favour of better understanding among the nations and for the development of the spirit of peace. We shall not forget that it was while he was President that the ICRC was called upon, during the Cuba crisis when world peace seemed momentarily threatened, to act as arbiter. Credit is due to Leopold Boissier for having understood in that grave hour that the ICRC could not evade the issue without failing in its mission.*

*The President's task is hardly distinguishable from that of an institution. I would, however, mention some fields in which he made a very personal contribution and where he left his mark. He was a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross from 1946 and was*

*elected President in September 1955. In the following year he had the heavy responsibility of directing the ICRC's activities during the events of Hungary and Suez. He himself went to Budapest in February 1957, and in November of the same year he led the ICRC delegation at the XIXth International Conference of the Red Cross in New Delhi, where he took the chair at the Council of Delegates.*

*Under his guidance, the ICRC had to assume ever greater tasks, whilst conflicts among men increased, and more delicate tasks too, as these conflicts were no longer the normal type of international wars, but rather internal disturbances, those "wars in all but name" as he called them. Events did not take him unawares and the 1963 award of the Nobel Prize jointly to the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies, our sister society, was a veritable crowning to his career.*

*That same year, our colleague had the privilege—and he certainly deserved it—of presiding over the Red Cross Centenary Congress and of taking part in the ceremonies commemorating the institution's century in the city where it was born and to which he never failed to do credit throughout his life of moral integrity and selfless service to mankind.*

*When Boissier resigned his presidential office in 1964 he was paid moving tributes from delegates of many National Societies gathered in Geneva.*

*But on ceasing to be President, our late lamented colleague by no means ceased his activities. He continued to be a member of the Committee, the Presidential Council and the Legal Commission, where his experience and views commanded respect. He had even embarked on a new undertaking, by participating in the founding and guiding of the Henry Dunant Institute, a sort of Red Cross university, still inchoate yet already showing enormous promise.*

*Death took him from us when he still had much to give, ready to continue devoting himself unselfishly to the relief of human suffering whenever a noble cause appealed to his innate sense of justice and fraternal ideal. My colleagues and I shall always remember this brave and upright man who deserved well of humanity and who will for a long time to come be an example to the generations who will have the formidable honour of following in his footsteps.*