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75 YEARS "UNIONE TICINESE".

The "Unione Ticinese" Mutual Help Society — Sezione Autonoma "Pro Ticino" of London, to give it its full name, is 75 years of age this year. A mere human upon reaching such a milestone can pat himself on the back and with a malicious grin settle down to really enjoy the further span that Providence might dispense. In the case of a corporate body the situation is not necessarily similar. Upon completing three quarters of a century a society may find itself stronger, more balanced than ever, or else it may hardly want to admit that it is just eking out a threadbare existence. The "Unione Ticinese" to-day is by no means as numerous as at the turn of the century when, in London, a "Ticinese" was to be found almost round every corner. Like the Swiss, the "Ticinese" colony has now dwindled to a mere shadow of its former self. But despite this very hard fact the Society is still enjoying on its 75th birthday robust health.

To reach this distant milestone the "Unione Ticinese" has had to contend with such untoward experiences as two world wars, which severely tried the population of the first City of the Empire, but left it undaunted. Immigration restrictions since 1920 have added their toll by preventing yearly additions from the home country even on a temporary basis. Nevertheless the Society has learnt to march with the times. To maintain its strength it has afforded every encouragement to the young, British-born generation to join its ranks, and adopted English as an official language alongside Italian. Furthermore it has admitted to its fold the wives, sisters and mothers by founding a Ladies Section. And well have the "Ticinesi" ladies proved their mettle during the past ten years: knitted garments and comforts for the troops (both Swiss and British), 'Xmas Bazaars, 'Xmas Draws, joint Tea Dances at the Dorchester, and last but not least the "Corale" which is now one of the Colony's attractions.

But this is all recent history. Let us dip into the Society's archives and see what we can find. There exists no document, if ever there was one, recording the circumstances in which it was decided to found the "Unione Ticinese." In the first volume of General Meeting minutes we read that on the 8th February, 1874, a meeting of founder members was held at the Electric Hall, Denmark Street, W.C., 87 being present out of 101 who had given their names. A provisional committee reported on a Ball which had been held to raise the first funds, and submitted a set of regulations for approval. These were adopted with the only addition: "That every member promises upon his honour to fulfil all the conditions set out in the regulations." To the first Committee were elected the following:—

President: Stefano Gatti — Vice-President: Mario Pagani — Treasurer: Stefano Dell'Oro — Secretary: Vincenzo Piazza — Members: Giovanni Veglio, Franco Brentini, Dazio Trongi, Roberto Vanina, Silvio Bruni, Francesco Gallizia and Giacomo Monico.

First President then was Mr. Stefano Gatti, whose name had been put forward alongside that of his elder brother, Mr. Carlo Gatti. The brothers Carlo, Stefano and Agostino Gatti were then well-known in London, not only for their luxurious catering establishments, but also for pioneering enterprises such as:

Charing Cross Electricity, Purveyors of ice imported from Norway, and also for their theatres and music-halls. The "Ticinese" colony looked up to them for their patriotism.

It is recorded further that the first Committee Meeting took place on the 12th February, 1874, at the residence of member Brentini at 100, Strand, W.C., in the course of which the following resolutions were passed:—

"The Funds are to be deposited with Birkbeck Bank, 29/30, Southampton Buildings, W.C., subject to a satisfactory report on its respectability and solidity. The Society is to be entered at the Office (sic) in London. The 'Consiglio di Stato del Cantone Ticino' is to be notified of the foundation of the "Unione Ticinese", and a copy of the Regulations is to be sent to the Swiss Consul in London."

The object of the Society, which has not varied with the years was defined by art. 2 of the original regulations as follows:—

"The object of the Society is to unite in bonds of friendship and brotherhood the "Ticinese" colony in this city (London) and to succour them in sickness and need."

Thus the "Unione Ticinese" had come into existence but it was not long before danger threatened. Already on 13th January, 1884, the auditors reported that: "... although numerically the Society is keeping itself on an even keel, this is not so financially, as since 1879 there has been no increase in funds." Similarly on the 25th August, 1897, Mr. Stefano Gatti, in his capacity as trustee, called a meeting of trustees, as a result of which it was decided to convene a General Meeting at the Adelphi Theatre on 12th September, 1897, with a view to re-constituting the Society. Despite the spaciousness of the venue, it is recorded, 15 members only were present and three excused.

Who would have thought it possible then that 36 years later the "Unione Ticinese" could be congratulated by Minister Gaston Carlin, upon his taking leave from the Swiss Legation in London, in most flattering terms? More flattering still was the action of Dr. A. Lätt, then N.S.H. (London Group) Secretary, in drawing the attention of the "Ticinese" head of the



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Federal Political Department at Berne, Dr. G. Motta, to the eminently patriotic spirit of his London compatriots.

It was under the inspiration of Minister Carlin that the "Unione Ticinese" took the lead in organizing a gala Banquet and Ball at Monico's on the 20th May, 1903 (ticket 4/- !) to celebrate the first centenary of the Canton Ticino joining the Swiss Confederation as an independent state alongside the Cantons of Grisons, St. Gall, Aargau, Thurgau and Vaud. At this function the then secretary, the late lamented Mr. Oscar Gambazzi delivered a notable historical speech which it would be too long to reproduce here. It is just in this Jubilee year that fate has robbed the "Unione" of the services of this "Socio Benemerito" who for 31 years was its devoted secretary and its President for three. But Gambazzi was on the Committee nearly all his life, and indeed it would be no exaggeration to say that for long periods he was the "Unione Ticinese."

This true Swiss was by no means the only "Ticinese" who served the Society well. We have already alluded to the Gatti brothers. We have found copies of illuminated addresses: one presented to Mrs. Maria Gatti, the widow of Carlo Gatti, nominating her an honorary member upon the passing of her husband; another was presented to Mr. (later Sir) John Gatti, a trustee of the Society, congratulating him upon his election as Mayor of the City of Westminster for the term 1911-12; (in the late 'twenties the same gentleman attained the office of L.C. C.Chairman); yet a third address was sent to Dr. G. Motta (whose wife came from the home branch of the Gattis) upon his nomination for the first time as President of the Swiss Confederation, for the year 1915.

Also we must not overlook the founder of Pagani's, Mr. Mario Pagani, who always gave the Society his whole-hearted support and accepted the Presidency on three occasions (1876-1879-1883). Several members of his famous establishment succeeded him in the highest office. But Mr. Pagani's successor in the ownership of Pagani's, Mr. Carlo Meschini, of Magadino, was no less a staunch supporter of the "Unione Ticinese," and after his untimely passing his spouse, Mme. Linda, together with their only son, Mr. Arturo, became the Society's greatest benefactor. Mr. Arturo Meschini was President in 1910 and again in 1915. The Society, however, experienced its most brilliant period upon the conclusion of the first World War under the inspiring leadership of "Socio Benemerito" Mr. Willie

Notari, who occupied the highest office for 16 consecutive years, from 1920 onwards, a most distinguished record.

Many will remember during Mr. Notari's term of office the Banquet and Ball on the 14th February, 1924, to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the "Unione Ticinese" the then Swiss Minister, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, in the Chair. The "Ticinese" ladies had banded themselves together and on this brilliant occasion presented the Society with a new richly decorated silk flag.

Mr. Notari's best speech was made on the 16th February, 1930 when the "Unione" in conjunction with the City Swiss Club, entertained Dr. G. Motta, five times President of Switzerland, on his private visit to London, at the Mayfair Hotel. But the London Swiss will always have a warm corner for the "Unione Ticinese" for it was the same Mr. Notari who at the Society's Annual Banquet and Ball on 11th March, 1930, at Monico's astonished his audience by offering £1,000 to the Georges Dimier Fund for a Swiss Home for the Aged in London, on condition that the Swiss Colony as a whole collected a like sum within twelve months. Needless to say this was duly done, and the "Unione" handed over their cheque during the Banquet on 21st March, 1931, the President of the Swiss Benevolent Society remarking that, thanks to this gesture the Dimier Fund had increased by over £3,000. (The necessary building was purchased in 1938.)

During Mr. G. Eusebio's 4-year term of office (1938-42) the Society marked further progress: it constituted itself an autonomous Section of the "Pro Ticino," the well-known patriotic association of the "Ticinesi" residing outside the borders of their home Canton; the Ladies Section was founded; contributory members were admitted; a special Air Raid benefit was introduced. Another youthful President was Mr. C. Ferrari (1943-5) who revised the Regulations, publishing them in the two languages, English and Italian; introduced the monthly social meetings, which have now become joint meetings with the ladies.

But it was the task of "Socio Benemerito" Carlo Berti, who reached the Presidential Chair in the first post-war year (1946), after being a committee member for over a quarter of a century, to revive the "Ticinese" social life after the gloom of the war years with the successful Tea Dance at the Dorchester Hotel. Thanks to him and other members of his family, the "Corale" persevered to ripen to maturity under the leadership of Mr. Carlo Valchera. Upon Mr. Valchera's resigna-

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tion the bâton was taken up by "Socio Benemerito" Peter De Maria, who incidentally now fills the office of Vice-President upon relinquishing the secretaryship after 18 unbroken years.

So much for personal contributions (we would have liked to have made the list longer but tyranny of space has prevented us from doing justice to legion of other members past and present), now let us quote a few figures to illustrate the financial achievements of the "Unione Ticinese":

| | |
|---|--------|
| Ordinary sickness benefits paid out | £1,312 |
| Burial expenses and funeral benefits | 664 |
| Members buried in Society's own graves | 66. |
| Profits of concerts organized in favour of | |
| Swiss Benevolent Society | 882 |
| Extraordinary outlays, subscriptions, donations to hospitals, charities, etc. | 700 |

These figures eloquent in themselves do not take into account special collections held at one time or other in favour of victims of disasters in the Canton Ticino, Switzerland, or the £1,000 given to the G. Dimier Fund already mentioned.

This being a record in which the "Unione Ticinese" can take pride, the Society is preparing to celebrate its 75th Anniversary by a Gala Banquet and Ball at the Dorchester, on Sunday evening, 23rd October next, the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, honorary President, in the Chair.

The celebration is being held under the auspices of a Committee of Patrons, specially formed for this occasion, consisting of the following gentlemen:

The Rt. Hon. Philip Noel-Baker, P.C., M.P., Minister for Commonwealth Relations — President Anglo-Swiss Society . . . Chairman. On. Avv. Dott. Enrico Celio, Consigliere Federale, Capo del Dipartimento delle Poste e Ferrovie . . . President. On. Avv. Antonio Antognini, Consigliere degli Stati, Bellinzona. On. Avv. Aleardo Pini, Consigliere Nazionale, Biasca. An. Agostino Bernasconi, Presidente Consiglio di Stato, Bellinzona. On. Avv. Plinio Verda, Presidente Gran Consiglio, Bellinzona Dott. Felice Gianini, Presidente Onorario Pro Ticino, Locarno. Sig. Franco Fumagalli, Presidente Centrale Pro Ticino, Luzern, A. F. Suter, Esq., Commission des Suisses à l'Etranger, Reigate, Surrey. Rocco Gatti, Esq., London, W.1. Emilio Monico, Esq., London, N.W.1.

It is hoped that Federal Councillor, Dr. Eurico Celio will be able to attend the function.

To end we would like to echo our Minister's words, in the Italian part of his 1st of August speech, that the forthcoming celebration of the 75th anniversary of the "Unione Ticinese" will afford the London Colony an opportunity to pay tribute to the Society for all that it has been and done in the past three quarter century.

J.E.

PRESENTATION TO MR. E. P. DICK.

On March 11th of this year Mr. E. P. Dick has celebrated the completion of thirty years service as Conductor of the Swiss Orchestral Society. On this occasion we published in our columns an appreciation for the eminent services he had rendered to the Swiss Colony, both as Conductor of the Orchestra and the Male Choir.

At the same time, a special committee was formed under the Presidency of Mr. F. G. Sommer, and an appeal was made to the Colony for donations in order to make a presentation to Mr. E. P. Dick. This donation list, is at present still open, and we invite those members of the Colony, who have, for some reason or other, overlooked this appeal, to send in their contribution not later than the 27th of October to Mr. F. G. Sommer, "Hepple Lodge," Holly Park, London, N.4.

The presentation to Mr. E. P. Dick, will be made on Friday, October 28th, 1949, at a Dinner, which will be held at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1. Ladies are also invited and the cost of the tickets will be 15/6 each exclusive of drinks.

Applicants should send in their names and addresses not later than Saturday, October 15th, 1949, to Mr. F. G. Sommer, "Hepple Lodge," Holly Park, London, N.4.

We sincerely hope, that a large number of members of the Colony will make it convenient to attend and thus show their appreciation to Mr. E. P. Dick for his great services rendered during more than thirty years.

ST.

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