

Oscar Gambazzi †

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OSCAR GAMBAZZI †.

*Sfiorire, rifiorir . . . e al gran comando
che voi, nuvole, senza fine muove,
ubbidir mi pareva, io pure, andanda.*

(F. Chiesa, Sonetti.)

Unenviable is the task of writing about an old friend while still lightly lies the sod upon his coffin, while we are still under the stress of the emotion welled up at the sad tidings, on the evening of Tuesday, 21st June last.

We are aware, moreover, that such was his modesty as never to approve of anything being said in praise of his work, which he performed so unstintingly in the cause of others. Yet however modest was the rôle which Oscar Gambazzi played by the very size of it we consider ourselves justified in naming it a grand achievement.

Born 74 years ago at Chur of a Ticinese father and a Grisonese mother, Oscar Gambazzi was thus endowed from birth with the best qualities of the latin and alemannic races, a generous disposition and an inflexible will. After completing his schooling in the Canton Ticino, he entered the Telegraph Office at Bellinzona as a junior, but was soon on his way to England in the wake of the then strong emigration to these hospitable shores. He was taken on the staff of Messrs. Monico at Piccadilly Circus soon after his arrival in London, and remained in the same employment for four decades, sharing in the rise of this flourishing business until it closed down when the "Blitz" started. He later transferred to Claridges, where he carried on right through the war despite the acute discomforts caused by the loss of his home at 121, St. George's Road, S.E.1, and failing health both of himself and his consort.

During all this time he was a member of the Unione Ticinese, which he served for 31 years as Secretary, 5 as Vice-President and finally 3 years as President, from 1935 to 1938, one year longer than his late brother Otello (1903/4 and 1916/7).

Great were the services he rendered this Society to which he was devoted, not out of any personal ambition but merely out of a keen desire to assist his compatriots and that his own Canton should be worthily represented in the comity of the London Swiss.

Indeed it would be no exaggeration to state that if the Unione Ticinese will be celebrating this year the 75th year of existence much of the merit is due to Oscar Gambazzi. Great is, therefore, the void he leaves in its ranks.

We would like to recall his historical speech on the occasion of the joint celebration at Monico's on the 20th May, 1903, of the first centenary of the entry into the Swiss Confederation of the six Cantons of Ticino and Vaud, St. Gall and Grisons, Thurgau and Aargau.

"Mi congratulo cordialmente con Lei dell'utile e istruttivo studio ..." thus wrote to Him Federal Councillor, Dr. G. Motta, then Head of the Federal Political Department in 1934 when the Unione Ticinese published a historical survey in booklet form, the material for which had been prepared by Gambazzi. Indeed the Society's archives are full of the work of His pen, a neat clear hand, showing what care He devoted to its affairs. In recognition, upon retiring from the Secretaryship the Unione Ticinese presented him with an illuminated address nominating Him a "Socio Benemerito."

But not only the Ticinese benefited from His patriotism. The history just mentioned tells us that already in 1901 Secretary Gambazzi drew the attention of the Unione Ticinese to the increasing help being extended to some less fortunate compatriots by the Swiss Benevolent Society. In 1916 followed His nomination to Vice-President of the same Society, an office he fulfilled with exemplary devotion.

So that people in our Homeland should be kept informed of the activities of the London Ticinese He contributed for many years to the "Gazzetta Ticinese" of Lugano. He also wrote occasionally for the "Swiss Observer."

The whole colony mourns the loss of this true Swiss and in parting we echo the words used by Dr. G. Motta on a similar occasion: "Riposa in pace, uomo venerando. Riposa nella quiete di Dio. Dalla tua tomba esce un monito che il tempo non disperderà: "O ticinesi . . . dimettete le vostre discordie, amatevi gli uni gli altri ed elevate la vostra coltura, onorate la vostra lingua, conservate il vostro costume; o ticinisi, la libertà è sterile se non è concorde il lavoro; il Ticino non sarà prospero che nella pace e nell'Unione di tutti i suoi figli."

To his widow, to his children and their families so sadly bereaved we extend deepest sympathy and our gratitude.

J.E.