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UNIONE TICINESE 1st OF AUGUST DINNER AND DANCE

at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

Exactly two hours after I had left the Central Hall, Westminster, I attended the 1st of August Dinner and Dance of our compatriots of the canton of Ticino, which took place at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

Who, amongst my countrymen has not heard, or sung that well-known song "I Ticinesi son bravi soldati"? well, I take it for granted that they are, although fortunately they have not, as yet, been called upon to prove it, but of one thing I am certain, they are "jolly good company."

I can not remember how many times, during the last twenty-five years, I have been privileged to be in their midst, but some of their functions, such as the 50th, 60th and 75th anniversaries of the foundation of their Society, as well as the luncheon given by the Swiss Minister, and Madame de Torrenté at the Dorchester Hotel, on the day of the 75th anniversary of the Unione Ticinese to the then Federal Councillor, Dr. Celio, are still vividly in my memory.

We other Swiss north of the Gotthard, have always had a sneaking regard for our Ticinesi; we love that heaven blessed southern corner of our country, where the sun shines so brilliantly at times, and the rain, also, at times, pours down so persistently.

If there would be a census taken at home, to show which of the cantons in the Confederation is the most patriotic one, the Ticino would probably be an easy winner.

Minorities in Switzerland have always enjoyed special privileges, and rightly so, do we not always spoil an only child?

The canton of Ticino in return for our affection has given us much in turn, first and foremost they have produced a statesman, who will for ever occupy an honoured place in the history of our country, namely the late Federal Councillor, Giuseppe Motta, whose statesmanship and sagacity has been recognised far beyond the frontiers of the Confederation.

That our friends "down south" are good and renowned hosts was proved again on this Saturday, 1st of August. In spite of the holiday season, and in spite of the prevalent scarcity of money they were able to muster an attendance of over 250. About 50 people sat down to an excellent dinner in the Orchid Room, whilst the rest of the company were accommodated in the large ball room at a buffet dance.

At the time dinner was served in the smaller room, dancing had already started in the Banqueting Hall, where Harry Vardon's band supplied the dance music.

From the youngest to the oldest, everyone seemed to enjoy themselves; whilst on former social functions of the Unione Ticinese "outsiders" often outnumbered the members, this time almost 90 per cent of the attendance was of Swiss nationality, it was indeed a most representative gathering one could have called it a real "Verbrüderungsfest".

Whilst the Harry Vardon's dance band took a well earned temporary rest, three members of the Swiss Accordeon Club in national costume took their place playing many of our quick waltzes and barn dances, which require a sound heart and a pair of

healthy lungs; these requirements did not seem lacking, the speed with which the dances proceeded was tremendous, and oh! the bumping, once or twice I was nearly knocked out "of the ring", no mean achievement considering my respectable "dimensions."

There were, of course, no bonfires, I do not think that the Management of the Dorchester would have appreciated nor encouraged them, but the fire shone in the eyes of our Ticinesi Ladies, and that can be a dangerous thing too.

Shortly after 9 o'clock the company who attended the dinner in the Orchid Room, amongst them the Swiss Minister, and Madame de Torrenté, joined the gathering in the ballroom. The Minister, and Madame de Torrenté received a hearty ovation on making their appearance.

During a short interval, the President of the Unione Ticinese, Mr. P. De Maria, addressed the company, extending to all the visitors a hearty welcome, and especially to Monsieur and Madame de Torrenté for having accepted the Society's invitation.

In moving terms he referred to the significance of our National Day, and to the oath on the Rütli. He said: "Although it is only 150 years since the canton of Ticino has formed a part of the Swiss Confederation, our association with Switzerland dates back to the origin of the Confederation."

He continued by saying that he had lately been reading a speech made by a Ticinese diplomat in which the assertion was made, that it was the Ticinesi who gave the idea to the Confederates of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden to "sack" Landvogt Gessler and declare their independence.

Whether this is according to facts, I do not know, as I was not there. The President very wisely



remarked, that he did not wish to start an argument with his friends from the north of the Gotthard, and I will leave it at that, but I will agree with him when he mentioned, that some years before 1291, the inhabitants of the district of Leventina from which he claims his Swiss origin, had revolted against the foreign tyrants promptly making bonfires of their castles and declaring the independance of their communes.

"But unfortunately", he remarked "we Ticinesi did not profit by our experience, and in a very short time the Confederates came over the Gotthard, replacing the former occupiers who had been thrown out."

Mr. De Maria then referred to the *régime* of the new "Tyrants", saying that it could not have been as bad as some people were inclined to think, and that under the rule of the Confederates the Ticinesi enjoyed a substantial amount of liberty, proof of which could be found in the glorious pages of Leventinese history when at Giornico, the invading Dukes of Milan were defeated when trying to contest the mountain passes to the Confederates.

After this short historical *resumé*, the President extended a hearty welcome to the other official guests of the Unione Ticinese, namely: Mr. & Mrs. R. Dupraz, President of the 1st of August Committee, Miss Silvia Morosi, Hon. Secretary of the 1st of August Committee, Father A. Lanfranchi, chaplain at the Church of St. Anne, Mrs. A. Berti, President of the Ladies Section of the Unione Ticinese, Mr. & Mrs. A. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer", to the Yodelling Trio Sommer, telling them how much their singing was enjoyed that afternoon at Central Hall, and Mr. Bossert.

In conclusion he thanked the organising committee for the work they had rendered, singling out, Mr. Carlo Berti, "Socio Benemerito" of the Society, who, he said, "like old man River keeps rolling along."

The address of the President was acknowledged with cheers, which had hardly died down, when it was announced that the Swiss Minister wished to say a few words, the latter received a sincere ovation when rising, he said:

"Signor Presidente, Signore e Signori,

I compatrioti che or sono poche ore hanno subito il mio lungo discorso pronunciato alla commemorazione ufficiale del Natale della Patria si spaventeranno

all'idea che mi preparo ad aggiungere parole alle parole, inni agli inni già elevati alla ricorrenza che oggi festeggiamo. Si rassicurino. Sarò breve. Ma la brevità non mi impedisce di dire al vostro Presidente quanto lo ringrazio per le cortesi e lusinghiere parole che ha ben voluto trovare nei riguardi di mia Moglie e di chi vi parla. Soprattutto di esprimere a tutti voi i nostri sinceri ringraziamenti per la calda accoglienza che ci avete riservato unitamente al mio plauso per la meritoria iniziativa che ha permesso alla colonia e in particolare alla nostra gioventù e ai loro amici di concludere in letizia questo primo agosto che per voi Ticinesi assume quest'anno un significato tutto particolare. E non solo per voi ma per tutti coloro a cui stà a cuore l'equilibrio politico della Svizzera e l'arricchimento del suo patrimonio culturale e artistico.

Cari amici ticinesi, levo il calice alle fortune della Patria, a quelle della vostra terra d'origine, alla prosperità dei Ticinesi di Gran Bretagna."

The short speech of our Minister was acknowledged with loud applause. This finished the official part of the evening, but before dancing started again, Mr. & Mrs. Sommer, jun, and Mr. Sommer, sen. regaled the company with a few yodelling songs which were as much enjoyed as their singing had been at the Central Hall in the afternoon, and just as much applauded.

Dancing then continued until midnight, when this most enjoyable evening came to its close.

Thanks, cari Ticinesi, for this fine patriotic demonstration, which proved once again, that our brethren of the canton of Ticino are indeed worthy members of the

SWISS CONFEDERATION.

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