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UNIONE TICINESE

Some three hundred members and friends of the Unione Ticinese met at the Dorchester Hotel in London's Park Lane on the afternoon of Sunday, 9th May. These Tea Dances of our Italian-speaking compatriots have become a very popular event and bear the seal of real family reunions. In fact, there is at least one friend who comes specially from Basle every time in order to keep up with a tradition started when he was resident in London.

The President of the Unione Ticinese, Mr. Peter Jacomelli, was in the chair, and he welcomed the Swiss Ambassador and Madame de Fischer, Consul and Madame Tosio, several members of the Embassy and the Editor of the "Swiss Observer". He announced with regret that owing to various reasons, the well-loved Ticinesi songs usually so endearingly rendered by the Corale would not be heard that day, and he said that what with membership of Swiss societies dropping, the day would come when all existing groups would have to amalgamate into one Swiss Society with various sub-divisions to ensure individuality.

The Ambassador was pleased to be with the Unione Ticinese and told the gathering that he, too, had Ticinese blood in his veins.

My maternal grandmother belonged to a Lombardy family, who had taken refuge for several generations in the Ticino, at Para and Ponte Tresa. From there, they had gone to the Canton of Uri, where several members of the family held the office of Landammann; then, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the family settled in Lucerne, later to finance, as bankers, part of the tourist machinery needed to handle the ever-increasing flood of British alpinists. This family were always fervent supporters of the Ticino on this side of the St. Gotthard. It was they who first taught me to know, to love and to esteem your magnificent Canton.

To me the Ticino is, first and foremost, the direct means of access from our country to the indescribably rich heritage of the Italian peninsula which, with Greece and Palestine, was the mother of our civilisation.

The Ticino is, next of all, the home of one of the greatest glories of our native land: I am referring to the masterpieces of architecture scattered by the Ticinese masters throughout Italy and nearly all the other countries of Europe in the baroque period. It is worth while to linger for a moment on this point.

At the end of the Renaissance a new style, less severe, more rounded, lighter, came into being. In its creation, development and perfection the Ticinese architects — men like Fontana, Maderno and Barromini, to mention only the greatest among them — played a decisive part. Their genius created buildings which became classical models: like the majestic façade of St. Peter's, the superb palaces of the Quirinal, the Lateran and the Vatican in Rome; the sumptuous church of Santa Maria della Salute, the palaces of Rezzonico and Pesaro, the Rialto Bridge and the Bridge of Sighs in Venice, and many others. These masters were in great demand and worked also in Austria, Bavaria, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Russia and Constantinople. In Austria alone, for example, Graz, Vienna and Salzburg are indebted for all their architectural masterpieces created between about 1530 and 1675 to the talent of Ticinese masters and, in some cases, of masters from the Grisons.

How does one explain the sudden appearance in places like Melide, Bissonne, Morcote and so on, of families endowed with genius who continued for two centuries without losing their talent, their energy, their cohesion,

and their attachment to their little Commune in our mountains? It is a most extraordinary phenomenon, similar to one which occurred in the Vorarlberg, and no easier to explain than that. All we know is that the long lines of architects were preserved thanks to their guilds, to professional secrecy, to their organisation in teams of masters and assistants, to their return to their homeland every winter, to their further studies and to their constant endeavours to perfect their plans.

Thus, the Ticino has given the Helvetic community one of its greatest causes for pride. You may be sure that I, as the son of a classical architect, can particularly appreciate the immense value of this artistic heritage.

Finally, the Ticino is, for me, one of the Cantons of our Confederation whose life expresses very characteristically the values of our federalism. The roots of its culture plunge deep into the spiritual traditions of Lombardy. But from the political point of view it is bound, without reservations, to the civic institutions of our country. The magic formula which permits the fruitful synthesis of these two elements is the existence of a sovereign Canton in the bosom of a liberal Confederation, and is expressed in your splendid motto "Liberi e Svizzeri", or in other words you belong to the Swiss Confederation in order to remain Ticinesi.

So you see, I have numerous reasons for loving and admiring your Ticino. I feel these sentiments strongly and I therefore seize the opportunity provided by this reunion to offer to the families which originated in that magnificent Canton and are now settled in London, my warmest wishes for their happiness and prosperity. May they long continue to bring honour on our country!

Monsieur de Fischer's words were well received, and his speech was followed by a recital by Miss Gillingham, a veritable virtuoso on the accordion. There were hand-some prizes in a tombola, and dancing went on until 11 o'clock in a very happy atmosphere.

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1965 The Year
of the Alps

Owing to lack of space in this issue, we are unable to publish a special contribution in connection with the "Swiss Year of the Alps". Events are taking place all over Switzerland to commemorate the first ascent of many Swiss peaks and the beginning of tourism on a large scale. Information may be had from the Swiss National Tourist Office, 458 Strand, London W.C.2.