

# Oscar Gambazzi

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## OSCAR GAMBAZZI.

Mr. Oscar Gambazzi, who until the beginning of the year has been Secretary of the "Unione Ticinese" for 31 years has given me a most interesting narrative of his experience during his tenure of office which I quote in his own words... "Having had a varied experience in life, such as an apprentice in a jewellery factory in Newark...New York; in Lugano, where I served an apprenticeship in a business house I landed on English Shores in the early days of 1894, and following the natural course of most Ticinesi entered the catering trade. Towards the end of the year 1896 I was engaged by Carlo Gatti at the "Grand Café," Villiers Street: Shortly after landing in England I visited the club house of the "Unione Ticinese" in Gerrard Street; that was my first introduction to the Society; little did I dream what the future had in store for me in connection with it. At that time the "Unione Ticinese" numbered nearly 400 members but owing to internal dissensions there entered a serious crisis which almost destined its fate. My practical contribution to the affairs of the Society started even before I became a member. At the beginning of 1898 at a general meeting held at the Adelphi Theatre, Strand, W.C., it was decided to re-construct and give new life to its activities. That meeting was the commencement of a new era but nobody could foresee then what an important part it would play in the Swiss Colony in London during the following years. For three years, from 1895 to 1898 its activities were dormant and was only a society in name. The object was purely of Mutual Help and only interested in internal problems. Some years before, when political strifes in the Ticino had its repercussion in the Society, members forgot its object of neutrality and philanthropy; political hatred entered and there was a great danger to its existence. Luckily there were a few level minded members who took the helm of the ship and guided by wise counsels managed to navigate this ship off the rocks and prevent its being wrecked. The Society was saved but its progress and development sustained a severe setback. Such was the state of the "Unione Ticinese," when the general meeting at the Adelphi Theatre was called. During the first few months after its reorganisation my dear old friend, Carlo Allio, acted as secretary, the secretary elect, owing to private business affairs, being unable to devote his time to the Society's work. We were together at "Gatti's under the Arches;" his great zeal awakened in me a profound interest in a scope that took my fancy from the beginning. Thanks to my friend I learned the intricacies of society work and without being a member, and after as an active member I acted as Secretary ex officio.

When in 1899 I was elected Secretary my apprenticeship, so to speak, was completed, I entered into my duties with enthusiasm and zest, with a firm determination to devote myself entirely to the Society, my sole aim being to promote prosperity and to bring it to such a flourishing position so as to be an example to other Swiss Societies in organisation and patriotism. The first years were arduous as it meant breaking down a great number of opinions and prejudices in order to re-affirm our prestige as a Society. Well do I remember an instance which instilled in me more than ever my persistency to vindicate the Society's and Ticinesi's good name. At the beginning of my term of office, I was representing the "Unione Ticinese" at a banquet of a very prominent Swiss Society and was seated next to a very influential member of the Colony; for some time his conversation was nothing but abuse of the Ticinesi in general: I protested energetically at the same time showing him that the Ticinesi were good patriots. My first President, the late Joseph Cattaneo, understood my mood, shared and encouraged my enthusiasm; his great foresight and experience helped me. I mention only one name, but every subsequent President (I served under 11 Presidents, alas some have departed) co-operated to the subsequent development. Gradually but with persistent constancy the "Unione Ticinese" crept ahead and now finds itself in the envious position she holds among the Swiss Societies in London. It was the late Mr. J. Cattaneo who conceived the idea to organise a fête for the benefit of the Swiss Benevolent Society in London and this fête has now for 29 years been a recurring event. There is another incident and perhaps there are a few who still remember it. An excursion of the *whole* of the Swiss Colony had been organised but the "Unione Ticinese" were not asked to participate. I resented this and protested; a phrase is still vivid in my memory...Nous nous croyons toujours assez Suisse pour ne pas nous refuser a nous joindre a une initiative patriotique.

When we had attained the position we so ardently desired and which procured for us praise not only from the other Swiss Societies but also from our great friend the late Minister Dr. G. Carlin, the present Minister Monsieur C. R. Paravicini and also the great Ticinesi Signor Giuseppe Motta, our further aim was directed towards financial development. I frankly pro-

claim that the great consolidation of our financial position is mainly due to the present President, Willie Notari, who, for twelve years, has directed the destiny of the Society; for him I shall always profess deep affection and dear remembrance and gratitude for the moral support he has always given me. I take this opportunity to mention other colleagues of mine who have faithfully served the interests of the "Unione Ticinese" and also deserve well of the Society. Our veteran, Mr. A. Bolla, a member for over half a century, has on several occasions, occupied the office of President and still sits on the committee: Mr. E. Biucchi who for longer years than I have been Secretary continues to hold the office of Treasurer and without ostentation watches over the finance of the Society. Others should be mentioned for their services but I hope I shall be forgiven for not doing so.

During the long years as Secretary I have had my share of disappointments but numerous and gratifying incidents greatly outnumber them. I possess many much treasured letters and hope I shall not be accused of boasting if I give extracts from some. At the commencement of the Great War I had reason to communicate an important suggestion to the Legation, it was accepted and Dr. Carlin wrote...31...10...14: "Cher Monsieur Gambazzi, Voici le résultat de votre démarche. J'envoie des exemplaires aux comités de toutes nos sociétés Suisse de Londres aussi qu'à notre consulat à Liverpool."

Another letter from Dr. Carlin.....January 22nd, 1915, shows the interest the "Unione Ticinese" took in Swiss affairs, I only give part of it... "Je tiens à ajouter mes très vifs remerciements personnels pour le dévouement et le zèle avec lequel vous vous êtes occupé de réunir des dons en faveur du Fonds d'Assistance aux familles des mobilisés. J'y ajoute mes félicitations pour les brillants résultats obtenus et je vous remercie également d'avoir bien voulu entreprendre, au bénéfice de notre oeuvre de secours, la vente de souvenirs de la mobilisation suisse." Another letter I had from Dr. Carlin in the same year, 1915, the part I publish will give the clue to its object:—"Depuis le début de la guerre vous avez bien voulu renseigner la Légation sur la nationalité et l'identité de vos compatriotes tessinois qui, se trouvant en Grand-Bretagne sans papiers, n'étant pas en mesure de fournir les preuves nécessaires pour obtenir les pièces dont ils avaient besoin. Vous avez ainsi rendu à la colonie tessinoise et à la Légation de signalés services dont je tiens à vous remercier."

A great honour was bestowed on the Society when I was elected one of the Vice-Presidents of the Swiss Benevolent Society an office I still hold. But while we endeavoured to assert ourselves we did not neglect the scope of the Society... *Viz.*— Mutual Help. If statistics were produced showing the assistance given to Ticinesi for sickness and need...members and non-members, it would testify that our National Motto... Uno...per... Tutti...Tutti...per...Uno, was faithfully carried out. Not only does the "Unione Ticinese" subscribe to the Fond de Secours, French, Italian, and Middlesex Hospitals, but it organizes fêtes for philanthropic institutions in the Ticino, such as, Ospedale Blesiese, Sanatorio Cantonale; Culla bambini gracili, etc.

I am proud to have been able to contribute to three important events in the History of the Society:—

1. The Centenary Commemoration of the Independence of the Canton Ticino, held at the Monico on May 20th, 1903.

This fête was really the celebration of the Act of Mediation, besides the Canton Ticino, the Cantons of St. Gall, Grison, Argovie, Turgovie, and Vaud joined the Swiss Confederation. In order to give this celebration a national character the "Unione Ticinese" had invited those Swiss belonging to these Cantons and residing in Great Britain to join in this festivity. The response was meagre and rather disappointing, due no doubt, to the fact that the "Unione Ticinese" had not succeeded in breaking down the indifference towards her, by which she was still surrounded. Our present Minister, Monsieur Paravicini, was then Attaché at the Legation, and I had the honour of being seated next to him. I still cherish the recollection of his approval of certain passages in my official speech: "The Independence of the Canton Ticino."

One incident of the Commemoration was that the President of the Society, almost at the last minute resigned and it fell to my late brother to preside on such a memorable event. My brother held the office on two more occasions.

2. The Jubilee Celebration of the Society in 1924 which coincided with my 25th anniversary as Secretary, on which occasion I was presented with a very nice Canteen of Cutlery.

3. To have sponsored in the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Society in 1930, the proposal, which was unanimously accepted to give conditionally £1000 (one thousand pounds) towards the Fond Dimier.

Before closing I must state that at the last General Meeting of the "Unione Ticinese," I was elected Socio Benemerito, at the same time as

Mr. A. Meschini, our Honorary Vice-President, who disinterestedly contributing in many ways towards the welfare and development of the Society is so well-known, appreciated and esteemed by everybody.

The title greatly repays me for my share in the work and of which I am justly proud. A title I shall always keep clean and unblemished.

## NEWS FROM THE COLONY.

## MISS SOPHIE WYSS.

"Miss Sophie Wyss has made it a point of honour to sing as much Swiss music as possible since she has been here. But in her broadcast on the Regional programme from London tomorrow there are no Swiss songs. She says that she has come across no suitable new ones lately, and appeals to the Swiss Colony at large to tell her of any recent additions to Swiss song which are really "worth while." Tomorrow afternoon she sings Jphégènes air from Glück's opera in which the despairing Greek implores the Goddess Diana to end her days.

Contrasted with this exquisite melancholy is a pretty and colourful air from an early opera of Lameau. The B.B.C. orchestra will be under the direction of Dr. Adrian Boult.

Miss Sophie Wyss sang for Dr. Boult last year with his Birmingham City Orchestra, but this is the first time that she has sang for him since he became Director of the B.B.C.

## TWO ALPINE SEASONS (Continued).

weeks in England. The writing of letters and the reading of detective stories, examinations of the map and plans for further expeditions, are the staple of our intellectual fare. And so refreshed, we set out at 2.45 next morning for the Sustenhorn. Yet I was humourless. Breakfast off an omelette which at that hour refused to be anything but a pancake was not encouraging. P., who led along the path, kept flashing the lantern in my eyes; the sack (a heavy one!) leaned on my left shoulder only and not on my right. We seemed to be on no path, but walking in a river bed. Early on I plunged a foot knee-deep in a water hole! Experience decides that the only cure for such monstrous irritations is patience; that when the first flush of dawn lights the snows above, when the dull odours of morning change with a breeze to the scent of flowers; when at last the sun reaches us, and with a delicious shiver man is man again, all the "Satanic rout" vanishes. The Sustenhorn is just a snow walk, hardly needing a rope, with fine views at the top. Highest of all the peaks is the Finsteraarhorn, with its red-seamed precipices, and with it the range of the Ewigschneeorn, Lauteraarhorn, and Schreckhorn. Far away we caught sight of Monte Rosa and the Weisshorn, the North ridge gleaming in an early sun. We made buttered eggs at leisure in a windless place, sat over them for an hour and a half, and strolled down again to Goescheneralp as the mists were closing round us, arriving half an hour before they burst in heavy rain.

Our last expedition from Goescheneralp was over the Alpligenlücke. We started this time at 4.30, as it was getting light, and mounted a steep path over a green alp. There in the freshness of that early dawn we trailed fingers through the long, wet grass, and plucked the blue campanula in passing. Moss, pranked with tiny pink heads, covered many of the rocks; little stalks holding a dozen golden bells of flowers grew unheeding across our path. All the time the sky behind us changed from dull rose to orange, from orange to palest lemon until the sun came over the rim of the brown hills. Truly my sack was heavy, but my heart was light in that sweep of turf and boulder and many a stream which "made sweet music with the enamelled stones." As the sun became bolder, so did we take to a bolder landscape. Snow slopes uncrevassed, led us upwards between piles of old stones and débris, until at 8 o'clock we reached the summit of the Lücke, and sat in the sun for half an hour. Once again we saw the incomparable pyramid of the Weisshorn, the Dom and Täschhorn, the Dent Blanche; only the Rimpfischhorn of all the conquests of the year before was hidden.

The contrast between the two years, this one here and that one across the valley, was severe, the pleasure equal. I had wondered whether this year there might be a falling off of sensation, a feeling that the successes of a year ago had driven from me the desire to accomplish lesser summits. No! There is in being among the hills "a feeling and a love" which no mere vulgar acquisition of peaks by difficult routes can spoil. They that have ears to hear and eyes to see can find, besides a new wealth of detail unnoticed before, the same deep and inexpressible satisfaction in merely setting foot on glaciers, in feeling the nail bite on good rock, in turning to see deep-blue shadows standing down the snows, in living and being and breathing among the eternal mountains. For there is in these creations of nature something which appeals with God-like certainty to man at his best.

TO BE CONTINUED.