

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1937)

Heft: 805

Rubrik: Unione Ticinese

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UNIONE TICINESE

ANNUAL BANQUET & BALL

at "Pagani's" on Wednesday, April 7th.

Oscar GAMBAZZI, President.

If in its 'teens the Unione Ticinese possessed such boundless vitality as it showed on the celebration of its 63rd birthday anniversary it must be an incomparable creature. An extraordinary creature indeed, when one considers that the influx of "Ticinesi" into Great Britain has dwindled in recent years to a mere trickle. Now it is but seldom that walking down Oxford Street, Shaftesbury Avenue or other main London thoroughfare one may chance to sight the once familiar signs: "Swiss Café," "Café Ticino." No longer, when one supps in a fashionable restaurant, is one waited on with meticulous attention by the youth with jet-black hair, intelligent eyes, slightly drawn features, but alert and quick, when asked if he hails from Italy, to rap out in reply: "No, I am Su-i-ss." With much of Nature's bounty still lying in wait of man's creative hand it cannot be that the obstacles at present put in the path of the free movement of people from country to country, continent to continent, will for ever prevent the ebb and flow of population over the world's surface, but alas no one can for the moment foresee when man will strike a new balance between the pursuit of self interest and the pursuit of the common weal.

An essay either for or against Malthus' famous theory was not here intended (a passing thought suggested the reflection which the kind reader will excuse), but even that great pessimist could not have helped enjoying himself thoroughly on Wednesday evening, April 7th, at the Annual Banquet and Ball of the UNIONE TICINESE.

To everybody's regret the Swiss Minister, Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, was unavoidably absent, the chair being taken in no less efficient manner by his deputy, Signor Clemente Rezzonico, whose recent promotion to Counsellor of Legation, caused satisfaction to the "Ticinesi" of London.

On Signor Rezzonico's right sat the President of the Unione Ticinese, Sig. Oscar Gambazzi, and, on either side of the chair, the official guests of the evening: His Worship the Mayor of St. Marylebone (Councillor R. Stiles Allen) and Mrs. Stiles Allen, Mr. P. F. Boehringer, the President of the City Swiss Club and Mrs. Boehringer, Mr. Boos, Vice-President of the Swiss Mercantile Society, and Mlle. Boos, Mr. R. Dupraz, President of the Fonds de Secours with Mlle Müller, Secretary of the Swiss Home, Mr. H. Caluori, representing the "Schweizerbund" and Mrs. Caluori, Mr. Perret of the Société Suisse de Secours Mutuels and Mrs. Perret, Mr. P. Savoie for the Nouvelle Société Helvétique and, of course, the Colony's Press in the person of Mr. A. Stauffer, the hard working editor of the "Swiss Observer."

About 200, members and guests, sat down to a succulent repast which reached the high standard of culinary efficiency we are wont to associate with the name of Pagani: An exquisite Turtle Soup, preceded by an excellent Hors d'Oeuvre, made way for fish, pardon, "Saumon de Montrose Poché," to be accurate, which in its turn was followed in quick succession by a steak, pardon again, "Tournedos Rossini," an ideal spring chicken, and "Timbale d'Ananas."

As if to stress the light-hearted atmosphere, which remains a notable characteristic of the "Ticinese" gatherings, a crop of humorous incidents, no doubt unrehearsed, such as the absent-minded toastmaster, who forgot and confused the names he had to announce, caused several bursts of hilarity. A solo effort by Signorina Eva Cattaneo, who bravely emerged from her "incognito," saved the Swiss Psalm (sung instead of the old National Anthem) from an untimely extinction. London Swiss audiences do not seem to be taking at all kindly to this new vogue; it is because, as one guest remarked, the cadence gives this song a funeral air?

The loyal toasts to the King and the Swiss Confederation having been proposed by the chairman, eloquence of the after dinner kind had a free flow. Flow is the word; an imaginative friend commented that its similarity to one of our mountain streams was unmistakable — hesitating at the start, a first rush downhill, then steady, another downhill rush, to resume at last a calm course.

Before proposing the toast: "The Unione Ticinese and the Guests" Mr. Gambazzi read out

the following telegram from the Minister, dispatched from the Sample Fair at Basle:

"Dalla Fiera Campionaria Le invio cordialissimi saluti.

PARAVICINI, attualmente alla "Taverna Ticinese."

General applause greeted Monsieur Paravicini's message the diners being overjoyed at thus knowing that our Country's Representative was in communion with them not only in a spiritual way but also in a substantial one, a plate of "polenta" and a bottle of "Nostrano" perhaps.

The President then said:

"Mr. Chairman, Your Worship, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Again I have to commence my speech with the same words as last year; I greatly regret that owing to absence from London the Swiss Minister is unable to take the Chair this evening. It is, for me, a deep disappointment, because for the third time as President I have been deprived of the honour of greeting M. Paravicini. But as we all know diplomats are very busy servants of the State and must always be at the beck and call of their chiefs.

I take this opportunity of referring to Monsieur Motta, the head of the Political Department (in England he would be called Foreign Minister), Signor Motta, our most distinguished Ticinese, has for the fifth time been elected President of the Swiss Confederation. We Ticinesi have special reason to be proud of him. According to what we read in the papers, times are at present very anxious and full of international problems, and little Switzerland shares with other nations this anxiety. I pray we shall be spared the distress of an upheaval. However, guided by the foresight and wisdom of Signor Motta, whom the world has proclaimed to be a most successful and masterful head of State, our dear Country is in good hands. May the clouds at present obscuring the political horizon soon be dispersed and our dear Switzerland emerge once more as a shining example to the world of a true democratic government. To M. Paravicini, Switzerland's worthy representative in this hospitable country, we also wish divine guidance, and may he, for many years to come, watch over the destinies of us Swiss in this country. The disappointment at his absence to-night has lost its sting in the happy choice of his representative. I have great pleasure in greeting as our chairman, Monsieur Clemente Rezzonico, our so well liked compatriot. I feel proud to have also the honour and opportunity of expressing to this true son of the Ticino our most sincere congratulations on his nomination as Counsellor of Legation. Mr. Rezzonico, I thank you for all the interest you have taken, and still take, in the welfare of the Unione Ticinese. I need not ask you to continue to do so because I know where your heart is. Mr. Rezzonico, I respectfully ask you to convey to M. Paravicini, at the first opportunity, my sincere regrets at his absence and also express to him the esteem and respect of myself and of the Unione Ticinese.

I also have pleasure in bidding a hearty welcome to His Worship the Mayor of St. Marylebone who, with his wife and family, has honoured us once more by his presence. Mr. Stiles Allen has on various occasions shown his partiality to the Ticinesi and I greet him also as an old friend.

During its many years of existence, the Unione Ticinese has made and maintained with true patriotic spirit the friendship of the various Swiss Societies in London; I feel proud they have accepted to send their Representatives as our guests this evening thus strengthening even more the bonds of this friendship. I must not forget Mr. Stauffer, Editor of the "Swiss Observer" who with his paper not only keeps us posted with the news from home, but also spurs us all to a generous response by the appeals he so eloquently makes."

Continuing in Italian, Mr. Gambazzi said: "Estendo pare un caldo e patriottico saluto ai cari amici ticinesi che hanno voluto presenziare a questa serata così cara e così importante per

il nostro Sodalizio. Non desidero essere tacciato di parzialità, ma non posso tralasciare di fare particolare menzione del patriottico gruppo di Semionesi, alcuni dei quali ogni anno fanno il grande sacrificio di un lungo viaggio purché possano dimostrare il loro attaccamento alla nostra causa, come pure dei numerosi Leventinesi che negli ultimi anni costituiscono il nucleo della nostra Società. A voi tutti Ticinesi un cordiale e sincero grazie."

Resuming in English, Sig. Gambazzi went on: "In our appeal to you we emphasized that the aim of this festival is to help the Sick Fund of the Society. The response has really been marvellous and I thank you all.

Members of different nationalities are gathered here this evening, but we are all moved by the same spirit of good will and friendship. Why cannot the world as a whole do likewise? Why cannot the leaders of the Nations put their heads together in achieving a lasting understanding? Differences of tongue? Differences of Creed? Differences of race? Look at Switzerland! Are we not living in peace and unity? Banish all rivalry between nations; devote their might to the help of humanity. Conferences are called but they are without practical conclusion — conferences in which there is not the spirit of co-operation and goodwill, but only the desire to usurp, instilled by jealousy and greed for power. Let us hope that commonsense and tolerance will ultimately prevail and that we may yet see a more peaceful world. The common enemy, the uncertainty of the future, must be made to succumb.

It would be rather awkward for me to mention the names of all those present but I ask to be excused, if I single out just two. Firstly Mr. Arthur Meschini, our Honorary Vice-President, and our generous host this evening, who is present with all his family and who has again shown the deep interest he takes in the development of the Unione Ticinese. Secondly, Messrs. Monico who have once again shown their patriotic spirit. Mr. Meschini and Messrs. Monico represent now the only two important Ticinese establishments in London. It is unfortunate that so many Ticinese establishments have had little by little to give way to the intense competition. This in turn has had a severe repercussion on the Unione Ticinese. It has caused a considerable lessening in practical support and a great falling off in our membership. All the past committees have endeavoured with success to maintain the patriotic spirit among the Ticinesi. They have kept the flag flying, they have continued to see that members did not want when in sickness or need. I can assure you that the present Committee will maintain this tradition and will not fail. We are still strong and still able to respond also to any appeal of our needy compatriots. So I say: Unione Ticinese "vivat et floreat!"

As our aim this evening is to amuse and not to bore, I will close but would first thank, most sincerely, all the ladies because it is by their presence that the "festa" has achieved success.

To Signor Rezzonico's admirable little speech one can only do justice by quotation "in extenso," and here it is:

"Signor Presidente, Your Worship, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is the second time since I joined the Swiss Diplomatic Service that I have the honour of speaking at an Annual Banquet of the Unione Ticinese. Modesty, as those who know me are well aware, is not my strong suit. I must confess, however, that the prospect of inflicting a speech upon you makes me feel rather nervous. You see, I have to contend with the high standard of after dinner speeches for which our Society is famous. Moreover, I am here to represent my Chief, who is a first-rate after dinner speaker and who, I am sorry to say, has been called to Switzerland on an official mission — which explains his absence. I can assure you that he is even more sorry than I am that he is unable to be here this evening; he would have told you the right thing so much better than I can. This fact leads me to mention yet another handicap under which I am suffering: as a Ticinese, speaking to other Ticinesi and their guests, I run the risk — in trying to say the right thing — of appearing to be blowing my own

trumpet. In view of all these difficulties which beset me, I hope that I may count upon your patience and your sympathy.

Some of you may have been wondering why the Ticinesi organise a Banquet of their own, distinct from other functions of the Swiss Colony at which, I hasten to add, they are always well represented. Having so wondered you have no doubt asked your Ticinese host, who will have answered more or less thus: Switzerland numbers about 4½ million inhabitants, of which approximately 71% speak German, 21% French, 6.2% Italian and 1.1% Romansch. As you see, we have in Switzerland four — or, if you take Latin into account, five — languages, three of which are official languages. We have all these languages, but we use them to express one and the same idea, which is to love our Country and to respect that of others. What is worth underlining is the fact that in our country people of different races, languages and religions live in peace, form one nation and are united and ready to defend this patrimony against any aggressor, whether French, German or Italian. This blending, if I may call it so, of distinct civilizations, languages and religions, which represents a slow and gradual development, form an entity called Switzerland, with a culture of its own, and a mentality which is different from the mentality of France or of Germany or of Italy, in other words, the Swiss mentality. This does not imply that each group has not preserved its own characteristics, but rather that it has learned in past centuries to consider the others as a complement to itself. What are these characteristics? It is, of course, difficult to explain in a few words but at a pinch I would say that Nature had given my German speaking compatriots a deep sense of order, of organization and modesty, my French speaking compatriots, genius and almost a passion for liberty and for individual rights, and to us Ticinesi candour, confidence, a high sense of patriotism and also that sense of the beautiful which makes our hearts throb at the sight of our lakes, our mountains and our valleys.

The Canton Ticino joined the Swiss Confederation in 1803 only. Before that it had for 300 years been subject to the thirteen Swiss Cantons. When they were faced with the choice either of becoming an independent Canton within the Confederation or of joining the Cisalpine Republic, the Ticinesi did not hesitate, and they were right. For then began the happiest years in Ticino's history. They chose Switzerland in spite of the fact that it had been described to them as a poor Republic which would only offer them shrubs and stones, a Republic without any power or glory, but the Ticinesi did not hesitate. Because then, as to-day, the Ticinesi wanted to be the exclusive masters of their own destiny. They placed above all other good or advantage the inestimable good of liberty. And they know that the Swiss League could offer them that. What did we give in exchange? A very great deal. The liberty granted by the Swiss Cantons to the Canton of Ticino gave the Confederation a significance which grew more universal and humane. Having admitted amongst its members a new sovereign State, a State with an Italian language and civilisation, the Confederation was able to proclaim and to apply its new ideal, by virtue of which — as I said a few moments ago — three languages and three civilizations, united by bonds of love and sympathy and by mutual interests, live in peace and strive for peace among nations. If, therefore, we are here to-night it is in our capacity of Ticinesi and Swiss. The love we have for our wonderful Canton does not impair our love for our greater Fatherland, Switzerland, not any more than the love of one's country impairs one's love for humanity. A good Swiss patriot, in our case, must first be a good Ticinese, just as a Swiss can only be a good citizen of humanity if he is first and foremost a good Swiss."

The applause had scarcely died down when Mr. P. F. Boehringer rose to reply to the toast on behalf of the Swiss Societies. He stated apologetically that the time limit compelled him to be short and, being a modest "old" gentleman, he seized on the opportunity afforded him by the fact that both he and "old" Mr. Gambazzi are at the helm of two of the Colony's most important Societies, to point to the fickleness of youth as against the tenacity of the "old bones."

The response to the same toast on behalf of the Visitors came very competently from the Mayor of St. Marylebone, Councillor Stiles Allen; his sparkling wit and command of facetious anecdotes kept the complacent audience rocking with laughter.

Mr. Arthur Meschini, the Honorary Vice-President of the Unione Ticinese concluded the speech making; he expressed the hope that Mr. Rezzonico will keep on making progress up the diplomatic ladder, and referred to the untiring work Mr. Gambazzi had for over three decades performed for the Society.

The official part of the evening over, to everybody's relief, not least of the ladies, the dance absorbed the energies of the young, and not so young folk, whilst the sedate few collected in the

distance for refreshment both mental and corporal.

It would be appropriate at this point to say a few words regarding the ladies present, to whose charm and garrulous gaiety (and delightful toilettes) much of the success of the function was due, but as your reporter is still a bachelor, it would be suicidal for him to reveal his taste in such matters.

During a first break in the dance, Miss Marietta Albertoli, attractively dressed in typical "Ticinese" fashion, sung two songs, one of which was a "Ticinese" folksong.

Much admired for its slickness of execution, and orthodox style, was the cabaret turn at midnight, entitled "May I Have the Pleasure" and featuring the acrobatic dancers, Roger and Lascelles and Ann. Not even a hint here at "strip-teasing" so that you are spared yet another dissertation on the issue, as raised by a celebrated cartoonist, whether this controversial act is art or just meat.

No Unione Ticinese function, however perfect, can claim to be complete without Miss Eva Cattaneo, the "Ticinese" soprano, and Mr. Gino Berni, who again very graciously volunteered to refresh us with their art. Signorina Cattaneo evoked thunderous applause with the ever popular aria "Ciribirribin," the hearers being so charmed by it as not to dare to join in the refrains. Mr. Berni too got a big hand for his "Parlami d'amore, Mariù," which he followed up, in response to enthusiastic encores, with a Spanish love song.

To end I ask the kind reader to desist, having got thus far, to grab after a revolver and fire at me because the Editor has already fired me. Of course, he was ever so charming. He told me that next time he would write the d..... b..... thing himself.

eusj.

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