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PETER DE MARIA †



Two days before Christmas; the streets thronged with happy shoppers; children expectantly dreaming of toys; at the office feverish activity to get 'clear' for the holiday; the telephone rings: "It's Peter Jacomelli here; I've sad news for you; Peter De Maria passed away suddenly at his home last night, it was heart failure. . ." We were struck dumb, we could not comprehend; only ten days previously he had presided at the General Meeting. He was in good health, and not a breath of suspicion that the end might be so near. We thought of his family; one moment conversing peacefully in the intimacy of their little circle; the next moment tragedy, the anxiety and desperation on realizing all help was in vain. Shocked was the Ticinese colony, nay the whole Swiss colony as the news spread of the cruel blow which had struck the family of one of its most popular and respected members, and no assistance could be offered except deepest sympathy and the sharing of the loss.

The deceased was only 55 years of age, being born in London of Swiss parents hailing from Molare (C. Ticino), in the year 1898. As was customary with Ticinese parents in those days, young Peter aged 10 was sent to receive his schooling in Switzerland, at the Collegio F. Soave and at the Scuola Cantonale di Commercio at Bellinzona. On obtaining his commercial diploma in 1918 he began his commercial career with an export firm at Burgdorf (Ct. Bern). It was not long before he joined his father and brother in the running of the family business, the Walbrook Restaurant, opposite the Mansion House. International trade, however, claimed him again, and in 1936 Mr. De Maria took up the position as foreign correspondent with Messrs. H. R. Munns & Co. Ltd. textile agents and shippers, later becoming a director of the same firm's Overseas subsidiary.

Next year our friend would have completed thirty years of association with the UNIONE TICINESE, twenty-

nine of which on the Committee. He was secretary for 18 consecutive years and this year he was serving his third term as President. It was typical of his generous nature that when the post of leader of the Corale became vacant he stepped into the breach, and thus this useful ornament was preserved to give enjoyment to the colony. For such distinguished service the Unione Ticinese unanimously elected Mr. De Maria a "socio benemerito" in 1949, the illuminated parchment recording his nomination being handed to him by the then Federal Councillor, Dr. Enrico Celio, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary celebration.

But the deceased not only served his fellow Ticinesi, but also the Swiss community. During the 'twenties' he was secretary for 7 years of the Swiss Sports Committee. He was also on the Committees of the Swiss Catholics, the Fonds de Secours, the Fête Suisse, and was acting Vice Chairman of the Assembly of Swiss Presidents.

Before such record of unselfish service, in the 150th anniversary year of the independence of the Canton of Ticino, I am reminded of a little known verse written by the first President of the cantonal government, the abate Vincenzo d'Alberti:

"Indiviabil morte e gloriosa
Di chi pugnando per la patria è spento!
Cade, ma vede uscir vittoriosa Lei dal cemento."

* * *

It was a sad throng that filled the Holy Trinity Church, Brook Green, Hammersmith, on the morning of 30th December last; they were numerous relatives, friends, compatriots and the representatives of Societies come to pay their last respects to Peter De Maria, whose sudden passing has left such a void amongst the London Swiss. In the congregation were the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté, accompanied by Dr. E. Bircher, 1st Secretary of Legation, and Dr. G. Lepori, Secretary of Legation accompanied by Mme Lepori. Also present were Mr. F. Streit, chairman of the Assembly of Swiss Presidents, Mr. A. Stauffer, Editor of the Swiss Observer, Mr. J. J. Boos of the Committee of Swiss Catholics, Mr. Jules Zimmermann, Secretary of the Fonds de Secours, R. Dupraz and many others. After the Requiem Mass and Service for the Dead, a funeral procession formed outside the Church; following the coffin were the Swiss Minister and Dr. Lepori, all the committee members of the Unione Ticinese and past Presidents. At Brook Green the mourners took their places in the cars for the journey to the Kensal Green cemetery, where the internment took place. Before the coffin was lowered into the grave, Father Lanfranchi, in a short address, comforted the bereaved family and gave expression to the general feeling of sympathy.

In closing we extend our sincere condolences to Mrs. Irene De Maria née Darani, and to her children Frank, John and Gemma, and assure them that their loss, is in a lesser degree, our loss also.

Pietro, valet. . .

J.E.