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# Tale of two blushes . . .

WAY back in 1951 the Swiss Minister in London, Henry de Torrenté, went to town for a fabulous party.

He literally went to town, by hiring Goldsmith's Hall for a night as well as half the 98 man strong Philharmonia Orchestra. From Switzerland he invited the celebrated soprano and Mozart specialist Maria Stader as well as the renowned concert pianist Edwin Fischer.

It was a white tie, full dress and decorations, glittering affair and it goes without saying that the diplomatic corps and the "crème de la crème" of London society were amongst those invited.

HRH Princess Marie Louise, granddaughter of Queen Victoria, was, as she so often was at the Swiss Legation, the star guest of the evening.

The buffet was a marvel in itself, having been flown over from Switzerland because Britain was, up to the end of 1951 and the re-arrival of a Churchill administration, still heavily rationed.

Maria Stader was of Hun-

garian origin and her real name, before becoming adopted by a Swiss family named Stader, was Molnar – which means Müller.

She gave up singing publicly in 1968 and has since described her way into and through the concert halls and opera houses of the world – including Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera and the Scala – in an autobiography. In it she describes the London Goldsmith's Hall evening and relates an event which I think is well worth translating and reproducing, her book having been published in German.

She and Edwin Fischer were, as she describes, waiting in the soloists' room.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. "Come in", Edwin shouted, and in came a stately figure with a massive gold chain around his neck.

Fischer took him to be the usher who calls the artists,

handed him a few coppers as a tip and Maria and he walked out into the glittering hall with its columns of Sienna marble.

Maria whispered to Fischer, "I hope you have not given him too much", then suddenly a magnificently clad toastmaster banged his gavel on wood and shouted, "Your Royal Highness, My Lords, your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, please receive The Lord Mayor of London".

And in walked, with enormous dignity, the man they had taken to be an usher!

As it turned out he took it all in good grace when Fischer tried to apologise to him later, saying that he now had a lovely story to dine out on.

In turn he then told Maria Stader and Edwin Fischer a story, which he said was a true one, about a well known MP who had the habit of often drinking a little more than was

good for him. He attended a charity ball with his wife which had been organised by a member of the Royal family and, as usual, was soon in high spirits.

He thought that it was his duty to dance at least one tango with his wife and as he came away from the bar and approached her with uncertain steps, she saw in what state he was. "Charles", she reprimanded him, "you are drunk again", and she refused point blank to dance with him.

But he was determined to dance a tango and approached a magnificent-looking pompous figure in a purple gown. "May I, Madam, have the honour to dance with you?" Whereupon a sonorous voice said: "Certainly you may dance the tango with me, but before you lead me to the floor I would like you to know that I am the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster".

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